

H I G H I D E A L S



and A S P I R A T I O N S

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art 1933-1993

By Michael Churchman & Scott Erbes



HIGH IDEALS
and ASPIRATIONS

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
1933-1993

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
Kansas City, Missouri
1993

DEDICATED TO

*Herman Robert Sutherland
with appreciation and esteem*

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F O R E W O R D

From the beginning, the Nelson has been the child of fortune. The very existence of such a remarkable art museum located where it is, confounds the expectations of many.

When the Nelson opened its doors sixty years ago, there was a general sense in Kansas City, and elsewhere, too, that a miracle had occurred. In barely the blink of an eye, as time and history go, a full-blown art museum appeared complete with a majestic neoclassical building that signalled Kansas City's extraordinary ambitions to build a temple to art and culture that would inspire and uplift all.

It could have been otherwise. But time and again, fate seems to have conspired to set the pace and course of these ambitions. Just the right combination of people, circumstance, place, and resources joined with genius and vision to produce a museum with distinguished collections from all civilizations, past and present. The Nelson, with its comprehensive collections and active programs in education and exhibition, has brought enjoyment and understanding of art, and of the human condition it embodies, to three generations of Kansas Citians.

In Michael Churchman's story of the Nelson, fate does not play the protagonist. His history is cast in terms of the men and women who answered opportunity's knock and turned it into an extraordinary achievement. They are as rich in number as they are in devotion. Many gave all their being to building or bettering the Nelson. The early trustees and members of the building committee stand out as giants who set a forceful course. Staff gave tirelessly of themselves. Members, volunteers, and patrons bolstered their efforts with unshakable belief in an ideal. People coming together to build something for the welfare of their community have provided for the progress of the Nelson. This was true sixty years ago. It is even truer today.

Michael Churchman's and Scott Erbes' book is aptly named *High Ideals and Aspirations*. There has been a labor of love, and I know that all who care about the Nelson join me in thanking them for this detailed history of the Nelson and its building. It is a superlative effort.

The *Kansas City Star* and the Nelson were both founded by William Rockhill Nelson. It is particularly fitting, therefore, that the *Kansas City Star* has generously supported the production of this volume. We are grateful, indeed, for this kindness and for the very special relationship that has existed between the *Star* and the Nelson over the years.

A 60th anniversary is a time to take stock, to review the past and chart the future. From the vantage point of sixty years, the broader outlines of history emerge and tradition seems to take shape. It is remarkable how many of the distinguishing characteristics of the Nelson stem from decisions made by the earliest trustees. That the Nelson collects the art of all civilizations is due to their openness about the value of the artistic creativity of all mankind. The Nelson's opportunistic approach to the art market originated with them, as did the Nelson's insistence on aesthetic quality over quantitative representation. There are other characteristics, but perhaps most important was the firm conviction that the Nelson should welcome everyone regardless of background or position, and that the Nelson exists to enrich the lives of all the people.

It is in that spirit especially that we who are privileged with the care of the institution at this juncture in its history, look forward to the future and together with all Kansas City will strive to build an art museum that will serve all the people even better than we have in the first sixty years.

Marc F. Wilson
Director

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

First and foremost, we both thank the *Kansas City Star* — particularly James H. Hale and Robert C. Woodworth — for providing generous financial support for this project. We hope that we have done at least partial justice to the memory of our mutual founder, William Rockhill Nelson.

The history of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art has been in leisurely contemplation for ten years and has been hastily written during the last twelve months when there was never enough time to do the job properly. That it has been accomplished at all is due to kind colleagues who have pointed out sources and patiently read drafts. I want to thank particularly Ann Brubaker, David Binkley, Dorothy Fickle, Patricia Fidler, Josie Gordon, Eliot Rowlands, Roger Ward and Marc Wilson for their generous assistance. Chuck Hill and Kate Hogan of the Archives have been unfailingly helpful in rooting out material and often lugging it to the Museum. Jan McKenna has performed prodigies of work in finding photographs and getting them into printable form. Everyone in the registrar's office — particularly Stacy Sherman and Tirrell Hellyer — has patiently responded to questions. Mary Ellen Young has proofread the manuscript with painstaking care. Briane Lawler has helped prepare the index.

Lois Kauffman freely shared her research on exhibitions at the Museum. Marjorie Tarbell Brentari, an old colleague from Colorado days, sent me the manuscript of her father's recollections. Ann Demaree helped find a long-sought photograph of her great-great-aunt, Mary Atkins. David Conrads has proven to be the ideal editor, correcting wayward punctuation and offering sound suggestions.

My greatest debt is owed to my wife, Jean, who read countless drafts, pencilled helpful suggestions, and shared her own knowledge of the Museum. She has been a true collaborator, and I am deeply grateful for her judgment and help.

M.C.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Since my arrival in 1990, the building in which I work has amazed me with its ability to both attract and repulse. On the one hand, it flaunts a grand elegance beyond the budgets of today's architects. But on the other, it wields a cold, classical menace reminiscent of Stalinist Russia or Nazi Germany. The Museum's sixtieth anniversary provided the perfect excuse to explore this paradox and discover why the building looks as it does. My essay, I hope, provides at least a partial explanation.

As with so many projects, this one was long on enthusiasm but short on time. I therefore owe its success to the willing, diligent assistance of many hands. At the Nelson-Atkins, I owe my greatest debt to Chuck Hill, museum archivist, and his assistant, Kate Hogan, who managed to transform a chaotic jumble of dirty boxes into an organized and efficient archives. To the following, too, I extend my sincere thanks: Vickie Allen, Steve Bonham, Cindy Cart, Robert Cohon, Christine Droll, Jean Drotts, Ann Erbacher, Ellen Goheen, Josie Gordon, Tirrell Hellyer, Bobby Hornaday, Briane Lawler, George McKenna, Jan McKenna, Bill Markey, Andrew Meredith, Christina Nelson, Rob Newcombe, Mary Jo Parsons, Maggie Stenz, Mark Stevenson, Brenda Sultzbaugh, and Mary Ellen Young. To recite their many efforts, always cheerfully rendered, would fill several pages.

For those outside the Nelson-Atkins who offered their expertise and assistance, I thank Jeff Barthol and John Dobson, Western Blueprint; David Boutros, Western Historical Manuscript Collection - Kansas City; Aurora Davis, the *Kansas City Star*; Virginia Krumholz, the Cleveland Museum of Art; Chris Wilborn, Wilborn and Associates; and the staff of the Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library. Special thanks go to Kim Sorensen at Ochsner, Hare and Hare, and to Craig Patterson for generously opening his trunk of family papers and photographs.

Without an editor, my words would lack style, clarity, and grace. David Conrads ably and efficiently filled this role without bruising my pride — the mark of a great editor. And finally, I give my thanks and affection to Stephanie Erbes. Though subjected to piles of clutter, she donated her good humor, patience, understanding, and support; her contributions, as always, were invaluable.

S.E.



William Merritt Chase, William Rockhill Nelson, 1907
Oil on canvas; 60 x 50 1/4 inches; gift of William Rockhill Nelson; [34-316]

I

T H E F O U N D E R S

The story of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art begins, appropriately enough, with the arrival of William Rockhill Nelson in Kansas City on a summer day in 1880. Nelson wanted a wider scope for his journalistic activities, and he decided that Kansas City was the place where he could prosper in the newspaper business. He founded the *Kansas City Star* which he made into the region's most influential paper. The *Star* and Nelson prospered as the city grew in population and wealth. Nelson was typical of the late nineteenth-century buccaneer newspaper proprietor, and by the time of his death in 1915 he had become indisputably Kansas City's leading citizen. By a series of unusual circumstances he was also to become the founder of one of the country's leading art museums.

Nelson was born a Hoosier in Fort Wayne, Indiana, March 7, 1841, the son of Isaac DeGroff Nelson and his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of William Rockhill.¹ By all accounts he was a restless, unruly boy, always getting into fights and scrapes, the despair of his parents. Finally, his father, an Episcopalian vestryman, sent him to Notre Dame College because of its reputation for discipline. Nelson later described it as "a sort of Botany Bay for bad boys."² He lasted two years before being sent home bearing a letter suggesting that he not return. He then studied law in Fort Wayne and was admitted to the Indiana Bar. Opposition from his father is given as the reason he did not enlist in the Civil

War.³ After its conclusion he went to Georgia to plant cotton and take advantage of the high prices this crop commanded after the war. A renewed supply soon caused prices to tumble, and Nelson was ruined. He returned to Fort Wayne and became a contractor, building roads and bridges throughout the state. By his incessant energy he accumulated a modest fortune "which was swept away in the collapse of his former partner whose notes he had endorsed too freely."⁴ In the election of 1876 he managed the campaign in Indiana of the Democratic candidate, Samuel J. Tilden. This experience led him to acquire a part interest in the *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, the local Democratic paper.

Nelson evidently liked the newspaper business, but his restless ambition caused him to seek a wider field and he settled on Kansas City as the place of opportunity. With a partner, Samuel E. Morss, he founded the *Kansas City Star*, whose first issue appeared September 18, 1880, from offices at 407-409 Delaware Street. A year later Morss retired because of ill health and Nelson became sole proprietor. Though derided as the "Twilight Twinkler" by Eugene Field of the rival *Kansas City Times*, Nelson's paper soon began to prosper and attracted such able writers as William Allen White, later the famed editor of the *Emporia Gazette*.

Kansas City was then a raw frontier town with a population of 55,785, which was thriving in the boom years of the early 1880s. Started as a trad-

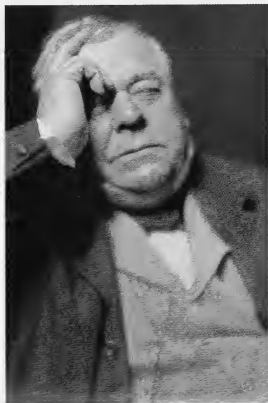
ing post at the junction of the Kansas and Missouri rivers, the settlement was incorporated as the Town of Kansas in 1838. Neighboring Westport prospered as the starting point of the Oregon and Santa Fe trails, but the whole region suffered from the disputes over slavery and the Missouri-Kansas border raids of the 1850s. After the Civil War growth resumed, and Kansas City leapt ahead after 1869 when the first railroad bridge over the Missouri River was completed. By 1880 it was a booming transportation hub, a market for the area's grain and cattle production, and the focus of investment by Eastern capital. Kansas City also had all the pains associated with quick growth. It was ugly and muddy, lacked services, and had few amenities.

From its first issue the *Star* crusaded for civic improvements. In one of its early editorials Nelson wrote:

Individuals profit by judicious and liberal expenditure of money. So do cities. Kansas City has reached a point when it must make such expenditures if it is to occupy the proud position which is within its reach. The pinching economy — the miserable parsimony which characterizes our city government must now be abandoned, or the city's growth will be most seriously retarded....Kansas City needs good streets, good sidewalks, good sewers, decent public buildings, better street lights, more fire protection, a more efficient police force — and many other things necessary to the health, prosperity and growth of a great city. It needs these improvements now.⁵

Thus Nelson set the agenda for thirty-five years of crusading for civic improvements.

Nelson also worked tirelessly for honest government, something of a rare commodity in early Kansas City, and constantly reiterated his belief in popular democracy. From his Tilden days he was a Democrat, but the *Star* was nonpartisan and independent. Later he was an ardent admirer of



William Rockhill Nelson, photograph by Pirrie MacDonald, New York, no date (NAMA Archives).

Theodore Roosevelt and still later supported the "New Freedom" of Woodrow Wilson. Experience with the political parties and factions in Kansas City convinced him that the only truly representative city government would be the commission type with commissioners chosen in nonpartisan elections. He favored popular initiative, referendum, and recall as ways to check venal politicians.

Along with civic improvements and political reform, Nelson also worked ceaselessly to obtain parks and boulevards for Kansas City. When he first arrived in Kansas City he pronounced the place "incredibly ugly and commonplace" and determined

then and there that "if I were to live here the town must be made over." Nelson immersed himself in the study of parks and boulevards and looked at what other communities had accomplished. He studied trees, shrubs, and grasses to determine which species would grow best in the local climate. He even "imported squirrels from adjoining States and turned them loose in the parks to add to their attractiveness."⁶ Though Nelson did not initiate the City Beautiful movement, as is sometimes claimed, he did give it his enthusiastic endorsement. "His genius lay...in ably adding impetus to a movement already under way" and in pushing its programs to completion.⁷

His findings were put into practice on his property along Brush Creek, then two miles south of the city, where he laid out streets and lined them



Oak Hall, Residence of William Rockhill Nelson

with native-rock walls and elm trees. Many of the houses he built still survive in the Rockhill district, even though his own house, Oak Hall, which he built on twenty acres between 45th and 47th streets and Rockhill Road and Oak Street, was pulled down in 1928. The site was to become the location of Nelson's art gallery.

As part of the making over of Kansas City, Nelson had long advocated the creation of an art gallery for the enjoyment of its citizens. "He had an

instinct for the beautiful in architecture, in typography, in manners, in every department of life. The great paintings of Europe fascinated him."⁸ He decided to assemble a collection of great art for the people of the region.

Most of the people in the Kansas City territory probably would never have the opportunity to see the great treasures of the world in the various galleries of Europe. Many might not have the privilege of viewing the works of the masters to be found in New York, Washington or even Chicago. I wish our citizens and neighbors to know art at its best.... Obviously we cannot take any large percentage of them to the permanent homes of the works that have endured so long, and we could never hope to bring these masterpieces to our own region. This leaves us with two alternatives, either to assemble in any galleries we may establish, works which are not recognized as of the highest order, or to gather worthy copies of those originals which have stood the test of time and are acclaimed as the foremost achievements in the realm of painting and sculpture. The latter course will result in the greatest good to the greatest number in our territory.⁹

While he was in Florence in 1896, in the course of a six-month trip to Europe, Nelson made the acquaintance of the Pisani family who were dealers and copyists. The core of the collection of copies he bought for Kansas City was acquired from them,

and others were added later. One of the most notable was *The Maids of Honor* by Velázquez, which was copied by William Merritt Chase in his student days. At the time of Nelson's death there were 60 copies of paintings, 30 casts of sculpture, and 450 photographs of art. The collection was called the Western Gallery of Art and was exhibited under the auspices of the Kansas City Art Association in two rooms and the adjoining corridor on the second floor of the old Kansas City Public Library (now the Ozark Building) at 9th and Walnut streets. The Gallery was opened February 28, 1897, and a small catalogue was printed by Lawton & Burnap.¹⁰ Setting out the rationale for collecting copies of only European Old Masters, the catalogue states that "the founders of the Western Gallery of Art, believing that to know the Old Masters is to possess the touchstone to enjoyment in the fullest and to intelligently and with appreciative selection, know all art, including the worthy works of later days and the untried offerings of contemporary painters, feel that they have not erred in the plan upon which the Gallery has been inaugurated and upon which it may be further extended." Nelson's insistence on the tried and true in art was later given significant expression in his will.

Nelson's art gallery and his baronial style of living at Oak Hall were all made possible by the handsome profits that the newspaper made. The *Kansas City Star* originally sold for two cents a copy and a week's subscription cost a dime. The price of subscription was deliberately kept low. Later a Sunday edition was added, and in 1901 Nelson took over the defunct *Kansas City Times* and published it as a morning paper. Advertising rates were high, and these revenues paid the costs of production and yielded the proprietor a generous surplus. As the papers grew and prospered, their offices moved and expanded and in 1911 finally settled in an imposing

Italian Renaissance-style building designed by Jarvis Hunt of Chicago at 18th Street and Grand Avenue, where the *Star's* offices remain to this day.



Ida Houston Nelson, left, and her daughter, Laura Nelson Kirkwood.

William Rockhill Nelson married Ida Houston of Champaign, Illinois, on November 29, 1881. She was the daughter of a physician and met Nelson on a visit to Kansas City. The Nelsons had an only child, Laura, who was born in Kansas City on February 14, 1883. Educated at Miss Barstow's School, at the Emerson School in Boston, and at various schools in Europe, Laura was independent, sometimes impulsive, and was adored by her father. She is supposed to have met her husband, Irwin Kirkwood, at a polo match. What is certain is that Nelson disapproved of Kirkwood and sent Laura to Europe as a way of breaking up the romance. Laura Nelson and Irwin Kirkwood were married in New York City, November 10, 1910. Nelson quickly abandoned his opposition and the couple settled in Kansas City. He built and gave them Stone House, adjoining Oak Hall to the east at 45th and Kenwood. This handsome residence now belongs to the Nelson Gallery Foundation and is held on long-term lease by the Rockhill Tennis Club. The Kirkwoods were active in social and civic circles in Kansas City.

Meanwhile Nelson was growing older and relying more and more on his team of editors to carry on the daily work of publishing the newspapers. Always a commanding presence who could inspire awe and even fear, he became extremely corpulent, weighing three hundred pounds, and also became less active and more reclusive. He died on April 13, 1915, at Oak Hall, at the age of seventy-four.

The will of William Rockhill Nelson provided funds for an art collection for the people of Kansas City. After first giving an income to his sisters and the widow of his brother and leaving Oak



Irwin Russell Kirkwood

Hall to his wife and daughter, he directed that all his assets were to be placed in the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, from which income was to be paid to his wife and daughter who were also made trustees of his estate. After their deaths Nelson's will stipulated that University Trustees should be appointed by a board consisting of the presidents of the Universities of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. "It is my hope," Nelson wrote in his will, that the trust be kept "free from political influence or control and it is my wish that the presidents of these three universities will

appoint and continue in trusteeship only such men as, having superior taste and good business ability, will carefully and conservatively manage the estate. . . ." They were directed further to invest only in real estate or first mortgages on real estate lying within one hundred miles of the United States Customs House in Kansas City, or in municipal or state bonds, or bonds of the United States government. They were also required to sell the newspapers "at the best price and on the best terms obtainable" within two years of the death of his wife and daughter. Each child of Laura was to be given \$1 million but sadly for Nelson there were no grandchildren.

After the deaths of his wife and daughter the income of the trust was to be "expended for the purchase of works and reproduction of works of the fine arts, such as paintings, engravings, sculpture, tapestries and rare books, the purpose being to procure works or reproduction of works of fine arts which will contribute to the delectation and enjoyment of the public generally....The university trustees...shall select works or reproduction of works of artists who have been dead at least thirty years at the time of the purchase of the same." In providing works of the fine arts for Kansas City Nelson held to his belief in the enduring value of the Old Masters.

Nelson's wife survived him until October 6, 1921, when she died aged sixty-eight. Her will provided that her residuary estate be "expended in erecting a building...to be used for art purposes" to house the works of fine art which may be purchased under the will of her husband. The building was to bear the name William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art.

After Ida Nelson's death the Kirkwoods moved into Oak Hall. But Laura Nelson Kirkwood lived there only four and a half years. She died in Baltimore, where she had gone to seek medical



William Volker, photograph by Morrison (NAMA Archives).



Jesse Clyde Nichols, photograph by Strauss Peyton (NAMA Archives).



Herbert Vincent Jones, photograph by Strauss Peyton (NAMA Archives).

treatment, on February 27, 1926, aged just forty-three years. The bulk of her estate was left in trust for the benefit of her husband, and after his death her estate was to be used, like her mother's legacy, to "provide a site for or construction of a building in Kansas City, Missouri, to bear the name of William Rockhill Nelson and to be followed by the words 'Gallery of Art.'" She also directed her trustees to raze Oak Hall and to sell its contents to "persons, strangers to me, doing business or living more than 250 miles from Kansas City, Missouri." The University Trustees were to have the privilege of selecting any works of art which they might wish to have for the new gallery.

Events now marched quickly toward the creation of the Nelson Gallery of Art. Three trustees of the Nelson Trust were appointed on March 3, 1926. They were William Volker, J.C. Nichols, and Herbert V. Jones, the first University Trustees. They moved at once to sell the newspapers, as they were required to do under Nelson's will. Bids were solicited, and eight bids were received. The Trustees sold the newspapers to what became the Kansas City Star Company, led by Irwin Kirkwood and A.F. Seested who represented other senior members of the *Star's* staff. The price was \$11 million. The *Star's* staff had been dismayed that Nelson had not left an interest in the paper to them, and there was resentment that they had to buy it back. There was anger also on the part of one of the other bidders, Walter S. Dickey, publisher of the *Kansas City Journal-Post*, who was determined to acquire the rival paper. He took legal action against the University Trustees and pursued the matter until October 1928 when the Supreme Court of Missouri dismissed his suit. He then appealed to the United States Supreme Court which refused in March 1929 to review the case. This action freed the University Trustees to purchase works of art with the accumulated income of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust.

Besides saving the *Star* for local ownership, Kirkwood also helped to settle the site of the new gallery by offering in January 1927 to give up his life interest in Oak Hall. The University Trustees were pleased to accept his offer immediately, and the property was given to the City. Unfortunately, Irwin



Frank F. Rozzelle

Kirkwood did not live to see the gallery of art, for he died unexpectedly on August 29, 1927, at Saratoga Springs, New York. In his will he left the sum of \$250,000 to add to the building fund.

Nelson's family had contributed generously to the building: \$850,000 from Ida Houston Nelson; \$1,200,000 from Laura Nelson Kirkwood; \$250,000 from Irwin Kirkwood. At his death in 1923 Frank F. Rozzelle had added his bequest of \$150,000. Rozzelle, the Nelson family lawyer and a civic-minded attorney who had no family, left his estate "for the upkeep, maintenance, operation, improvement, and construction of the art building erected or to be erected under the provisions of the will of Ida H. Nelson." To these substantial sums the trustees of Mary Atkins' estate now decided to add the principal of her trust, and it is the Atkins story which must be told next.

The people of Kansas City were surprised to learn that a relatively unknown fellow citizen, Mary McAfee Atkins, had died on October 13, 1911, and left the sum of \$300,000 to build a museum of fine

arts. Her legacy was for the "purchase of the necessary ground in Kansas City, Missouri, and the erection of a building to be maintained and used as a Museum of Fine Arts for the use and benefit of the public, and to be called the 'Atkins Museum of Fine Arts.'" Mary McAfee was born October 22, 1836, in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, and taught school there until 1878 when she married James Burris Atkins and moved to Kansas City. James Atkins, who was also a Kentuckian and a longtime friend of Mary McAfee, had moved in 1865 to Kansas City where he had gone into the milling business. A childless



Mary McAfee Atkins

widower when he and Mary married, he had become very successful from speculation in Kansas City real estate. He died in 1886, leaving Mary an inconsolable and rich fifty-year-old widow. Burris Atkins

Jenkins, son of her husband's close friend, remembered Mary Atkins in her widowhood as a "slender, angular-looking, spinsterish type of woman."¹¹

After a year of grief and withdrawal Mary Atkins was coaxed back into active life by Sarah Jenkins, the widow of her husband's best friend. A new bright spot in her life was provided also by her husband's niece, sixteen-year-old Elizabeth Salmon, whom Mary brought from Kentucky to live with her.



Mary McAfee Atkins, aged 66, from a family photograph taken in Kentucky, 1902 (courtesy of Alice Royalty Clark, great-niece of Mary Atkins).

Elizabeth attended Central High School in Kansas City where one of her teachers was Adolph Frederick Jaquemot, a Swiss who taught foreign languages. In due course Elizabeth and Frederick Jaquemot were married in 1899 and went to live in Switzerland. The Jaquemots persuaded Mary Atkins to visit them, and she made her first trip to Europe in 1902.¹²

This trip was followed by seven other summer visits to the Jaquemots, during which she went to see the collections of the Louvre and the Luxembourg in Paris, the National Gallery in

London, and the Saxon royal museums in Dresden. "Mary Atkins's trips abroad were possibly the happiest times of her life. Her visits to the art galleries of Europe gave her the inspiration she hoped others might find as well."¹³ Her response to the art treasures of Europe together with her strong sense of community obligation were evidently the sources of her decision to leave funds for a museum of fine arts.

The trustees of her estate, A.W. Childs and Herbert V. Jones, faced some difficulties in carrying out Mary Atkins' intentions. Her estate consisted mostly of Kansas City real estate which took time to convert into cash. Then the trustees soon discovered that \$300,000 was not a sufficient sum to build a suitable museum. Various proposals were made — that the museum should be incorporated into a twenty-story civic center, later that it should be placed in Penn Valley Park. Childs and Jones retained the architectural firm of Wight and Wight in 1920, but it was not until early 1927 that it was announced that the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts would be constructed on a site on the west side of the mall south of the Liberty Memorial. By that time the Atkins Trust had grown to \$700,000, thanks to the prudent management of the trustees.

At this juncture the Atkins trustees sent R.A. Holland of the Kansas City Art Institute and the architect William Wight on a tour of American cities to study art museums. "Of all they learned about museum planning, nothing was as important as what every museum director told them about keeping local art interests together. [The directors] unanimously agreed that all supporters of the arts in a community should cooperate."¹⁴ Early in 1927 Irwin Kirkwood had announced his intention to give the Oak Hall property for the Nelson gallery. It seemed sensible to consider combining the Atkins and Nelson funds, and the Nelson trustees gave their

approval to such a proposal on July 11, 1927. Achievement of this unity of purpose was probably aided by the fact that Herbert V. Jones was a trustee of both estates.

Thus it came about that the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts would be joined into one institution. Funds on hand for the museum building were generous, even lavish: \$2,450,000 from Nelson sources and \$700,000 from Mary Atkins. The trustees of the various estates, committed to uniting their funds and energies, now had the opportunity to create an art museum to rival the best in the country.

¹ The Nelson-Atkins Museum has an elaborate silver punch bowl engraved "The Hoosier — 1902," a relic of Nelson's yacht which he named in honor of his birthplace.

² William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement in Kansas City*, (Kansas City, Missouri: The Lowell Press, 1964), p. 14.

³ Victor Rosewater, "William Rockhill Nelson," *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. VII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 428.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Quoted in *William Rockhill Nelson: The Story of a Man a Newspaper and a City*, by Members of the staff of the *Kansas City Star*, (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1915), p. 27.

⁶ *William Rockhill Nelson*, p. 41.

⁷ Wilson, *City Beautiful*, p. 11.

⁸ *William Rockhill Nelson*, p. 177.

⁹ Quoted in Nicholas S. Pickard, "The Friends of Art of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum: A History," Typescript, 1981, p. A6.

¹⁰ Frank P. Burnap, partner in the printing firm, became the collector and donor with his wife, Harriet, of the Burnap Collection of English Pottery.

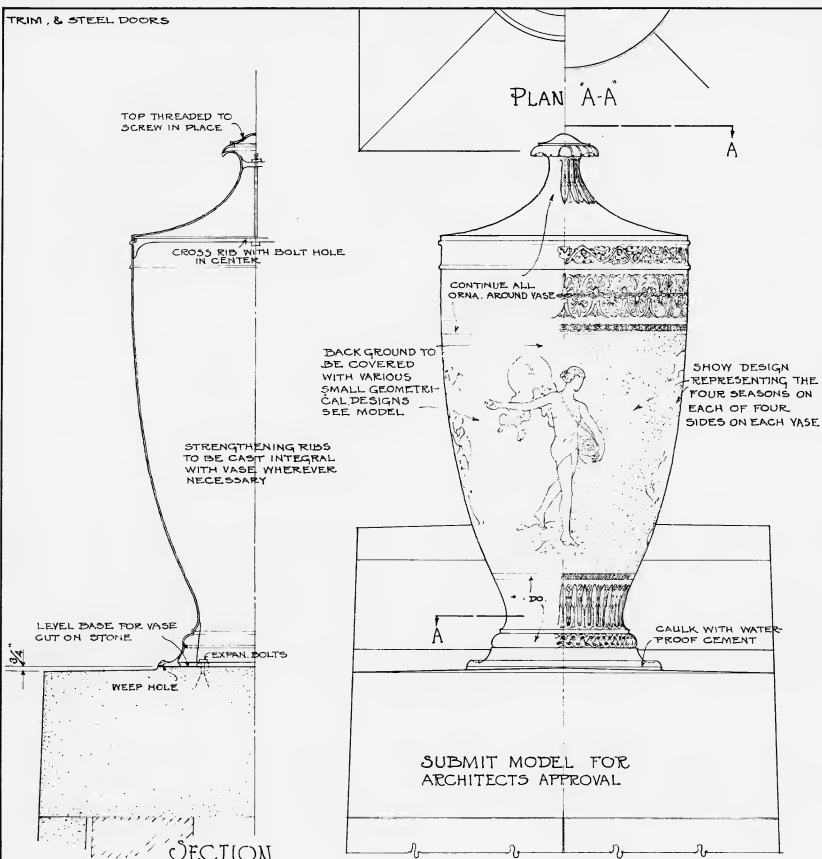
¹¹ *Kansas City Star*, March 18, 1931. The fullest account of Mary Atkins's life is given in Kristie C. Wolferman, "The Creation of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: 1911-1933" (M. A. thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1986), pp. 18-26. See also Wilda Sandy, "A Widow's Mite: The Bequest of Mary Atkins," Typescript, 1986.

¹² An earlier United States Passport, signed by John Hay, secretary of state, and dated May 3, 1900, is now in the Nelson-Atkins Museum Archives. It gives her height as 5'3" and her hair as gray and describes her nose as "Grecian." The passport contains visas for Turkey and Japan, though whether she ever visited those countries is unclear.

¹³ Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

TRIM, & STEEL DOORS



SECTION
 2" SCALE DTL. OF CAST BRONZE VASE ON SOUTH
 ENTRANCE STEP BUTTRESSES

REVISED JUNE 23, 1930

WILLIAM ROCKHILL NELSON GALLERY OF ART
 AND
 ATKINS MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
 KANSAS CITY
 MISSOURI

WIGHT & WIGHT
 ARCHITECTS
 KANSAS CITY MO.

NO. DATE-4/10-'29
 25 MADE- E.D.T.-E.J.C.
 CHECKED-

Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
 Working drawing: **Bronze Ornamentation** (detail), April 10, 1929
 Ink on linen; 24-1/2 x 63-3/4 in.; NAMA Archives

II

T H E B U I L D I N G

While the University Trustees — Volker, Nichols, and Jones — were occupied with defending the sale of the *Kansas City Star* and with devising a strategy to acquire art, the trustees of the various Nelson, Kirkwood, Rozzelle, and Atkins estates turned their attention to the construction of the museum building on the Oak Hall site. The New England National Bank and Trust Company, represented by John F. Downing and Albert R. Strother, acted for the estates of Ida Nelson, both Kirkwoods, and Frank Rozzelle. The Kirkwoods' personal trustees included Fred C. Vincent, John E. Wilson, and Earl McCollum. The Atkins trustees were A.W. Childs and Herbert V. Jones. These seven men, working in close cooperation with the University Trustees, oversaw the building of the museum. As planning and construction got under way, they formed a building committee in 1929, with Vincent as chairman.

The trustees' first concern was to choose an architect. There seems to have been little debate: the choice fell naturally on the firm of Wight and Wight. This firm had been selected by the Atkins trustees in 1920, and the Wights had recently built the New England Bank building. Downing, the Bank's chairman, announced on June 3, 1927, the selection of Wight and Wight.¹ E.D. Tarbell, the firm's chief draftsman, wrote that "there was no competition.... The trustees simply handed Tom Wight

the job ... on a silver platter. It was his reputation that did it."²

The senior of the brothers was Thomas Wight (1874-1949), who was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Educated in Canadian schools, he went on to study architecture in Italy and Greece. He came to New York and in 1892 joined the prestigious firm of McKim, Mead and White. He moved to Kansas City in 1904 and began his practice with Edward T. Wilder. Thomas Wight and his first partner "became major exponents of neoclassicism, and the First National Bank was an important, early [1906] statement of that mode."³ His younger brother, William Drewin Wight (1882-1947), followed the same path — Halifax, study in Italy, McKim, Mead and White in New York — and arrived in Kansas City in 1911.⁴ For the next fifteen years Wight and Wight captured many commissions and became one of the city's leading firms. Among the buildings they designed were the Kansas City Life Insurance building, Wyandotte County Courthouse and Mercy Hospital. Some of their important assignments in the late 1930s were City Hall, the Jackson County Courthouse, and the Federal Courts Building.

The Wights' neoclassical idiom was perfectly suited to contemporary notions of design for an art museum. In the era between World Wars I and II a number of distinguished museums were built in large American cities. Cleveland in 1916 and

Philadelphia in 1924 had constructed impressive edifices, both in the neoclassical style. The National Gallery in Washington, which was built between 1937 and 1941, completed the interwar era of classical museum buildings.

Thomas Wight started work on designing the gallery. By August 1927 a general sketch plan of the building had been tentatively approved by the building committee. As E.D. Tarbell recalled, "When he was ready to leave for Nova Scotia..., [though] very little thought had been given to the design of the building, he went anyway. The job could wait." While he was away on vacation he asked Tarbell to develop the sketches. "See what you can work out on a design for the gallery while I'm gone. Keep it simple, and I would prefer a variation of the Greek Ionic Order," he said. Tarbell remembered that "I turned my whole attention to the Art Gallery and had a pleasant summer sketching on possible designs, one of which was used in the final detailed sketches."⁵ While in Nova Scotia, Wight himself worked on the design. During the fall and winter of 1927-1928 the plans took shape under the anxious watch of the trustees and building committee.

The trustees were concerned about the costs and the suitability of the design for the needs of an art museum. On July 11, 1928, they appointed Roy Collins, an experienced contractor, to assist Wight and Wight on the plans. Collins confirmed to the trustees on February 5, 1929, that the estimate of \$2,450,000 was accurate. The trustees also visited other museums and talked with directors. Herbert V. Jones, writing to John E. Wilson from Paris, August 1, 1928, said he had talked with "people connected with museums here and in London, and without exception they all say we should have our own director or curator before we finally decide on plans for our building." He added: "I hate even to suggest

anything that would cause only further delay, but I know we all want to do the right thing and not make any serious mistakes."⁶

After the plans were completed, "the University Trustees and the building committee sent Fred C. Vincent, J.C. Nichols, Herbert V. Jones, and Thomas Wight on a trip to the east coast to confer with museum directors and architects," though there is no record of their specific findings.⁷ There was discussion of employing a consulting architect, an idea not popular with Wight. William Mitchell Kendall, a partner in McKim, Mead and White, who had designed the new wings to the Metropolitan Museum, reviewed the plans and made the valuable suggestion of "opening up . . . the first floor so as to give a full view from north to south," a reference to the plan for the great hall.⁸ A courtyard proposed for the east wing was eliminated and interior galleries were created instead. A long-running discussion centered on the question of lighting for the works of art. Artificial light was finally chosen, though the first-floor galleries were designed with windows to admit natural light as well. Later, over Wight's protests, the building committee submitted the plans to Frederic A. Whiting, director of the Cleveland Museum, for his opinion and advice.⁹ Whiting generally approved the plans, though he made some suggestions about the interior arrangement of galleries, which were incorporated in the plans. Finally on March 17, 1930, the building committee and trustees approved the plans. It had been two years and nine months since Wight and Wight had been chosen, but the trustees wanted to build the best museum they could for Kansas City, and they had proceeded carefully.

Their next challenge was to select a general contractor, and here they were very fortunate in finding John C. Long of the Long Construction Company. Long proposed in a letter to Thomas

Wight, June 11, 1930, to furnish all labor and materials for the actual cost, plus a fixed fee of ninety-six thousand dollars. After bids had been received from the sub-contractors, he offered to "establish a guaranteed maximum cost. If the actual cost exceeds our guaranteed maximum, we would stand the loss, but all savings under this maximum would accrue to the trustees." Such a contract, he said, "would bring all parties closer together, . . . would enable the trustees to expend the money to the greatest possible advantage, . . . and would definitely result in producing a well-built building at the minimum cost." In concluding his letter, Long wrote:

These buildings are to be built as fitting memorials to their givers and for the pleasure and benefit of the citizens of Kansas City. All who help in their creation will be doing something for the common good. It is with these thoughts in my mind that I would carry on the work.¹⁰

The final contract was for \$2,675,000.

It was reported in the *Kansas City Times* on June 27, 1930, that the trustees had instructed John C. Long to prepare for an immediate start. The groundbreaking took place on July 16, 1930, when John F. Downing turned the first shovel full of earth. "We launch this venture in gratitude," said Mr. Downing, "and in the hope it will prove a beacon of enlightenment to this city and territory for generations to come."¹¹ It was estimated that construction would take two years.

Indeed, for the next two years *Nelson's Star* and *Times* published a steady stream of reports, drawings, and photographs on the gallery's progress. After the groundbreaking, two steam shovels moved in and

excavated sixty thousand tons of dirt and rock in the next two months. After the foundations were in place, the forms were prepared for pouring the first floor. This operation was accomplished in one day (December 1, 1930), under threat of a freeze.¹²

By January 11, 1931, it was reported that the steel frame was in place and limestone for the gallery's exterior walls was being quarried near Bloomington, in Nelson's native state of Indiana. The first of 196 carloads of limestone arrived February 20, 1931, and the last shipment was in August. Sufficient progress had been made that it was possible to lay cornerstones, and indeed there were two of them. The Atkins Museum stone was laid on April 5, 1931. It contained, according to Simpson's history, a copper box in which were placed "the Atkins will, the story of Mrs. Atkins's life, a list of names of men who had responsible positions in erecting the building, copies of two newspapers, and some sample coins."¹³ The stone was laid by A.W. Childs and Herbert V. Jones. The Nelson Gallery stone was laid on May 3, 1931, by John F. Downing. The forty-voice boys choir of Grace and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, which had been endowed by Laura Nelson Kirkwood in memory of her mother, sang "The Church's One Foundation." Besides Downing the other dignitaries who participated were Robert Nelson Spencer, Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Western Missouri; J.C. Nichols, University Trustee; and Henry J. Haskell, editor of the *Kansas City Star*, who gave an address about William Rockhill Nelson.¹⁴

Stone setting had begun in February and was complete by September 1931. Each piece was cut and numbered at the quarry, including the drums for the thirty-two columns and the blocks for the cornice. By the summer of 1932 the building was virtually completed, and only work on the interior

remained to be done. Because of the high quality of the interior finishes, many of them of marble with bronze doors and hardware, this stage took more than a year. The building was formally turned over to the trustees on September 30, 1933.

By this date development of the grounds was also far advanced. Landscape design was the work of Hare and Hare. Sid Hare and his son, S. Herbert Hare, were the principals in the firm, and the Gallery became one of their best known projects. Donald W. Bush, an associate in the firm, explained the planning concept to a reporter:

We tried to avoid trick landscaping. We concluded [that] our job was to link the thick-treed informality of Rockhill homes with the classic, conservative lines of the Gallery as inconspicuously and pleasingly as possible. So we kept the edges of the estate informal, with big trees, masses of shrubs, and as we worked inwards, more evergreens and formal accenting were introduced until the link to the Gallery was complete. ...We planned so that all planting would lead toward the building.¹⁵

The scale of the planting was immense: 6,900 evergreens, 18,000 deciduous shrubs, 800 peonies, and 2,300 rambling roses. The most prominent feature of Hare and Hare's plans was three acres of formal lawn leading from the south steps towards Brush Creek.

By the fall of 1933 a visitor could see the landscaped grounds and the immense neoclassical edifice, 390 feet long, 175 feet wide, and the height of a six-story office building. The limestone on the exterior was of the hardest grade, in keeping with the policy of selecting the best materials; it had been

chosen because of its durability and its color, a warm buff with a rosy cast. At the second-story level there were twenty-three relief panels which were carved with designs by the sculptor Charles Keck, depicting the opening of the West.¹⁶ Other outstanding features of the exterior were the three bronze casements and doors which were modelled by Keck and told the story of Hiawatha. Two large bronze vases, designed by Thomas Wight with reliefs of the four seasons by Keck, were placed at either side of the south steps.

The interior provided a great central space, Kirkwood Hall, rising forty feet to a sky-lighted, ceiling, and two large wings with galleries for art. The east wing, built with funds from the Atkins estate and officially called the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts, had two floors of galleries; on the ground floor were office spaces, classrooms, and a library. It also had a handsome entrance on the east side, facing Rockhill Road, which gave access to an auditorium and a grand stairway.¹⁷ The west wing contained a courtyard which was surrounded by a two-story arcade, but the remainder of the wing was a vast empty shell which allowed space for future expansion. The ground floor of the west wing was completed and held offices, work areas, and storage facilities. On the west side there was a business entrance and a loading area which gave onto Oak Street.

Though the main façade faced south over a sweep of lawn which looked towards Brush Creek and the new campuses of the Barstow School and the University of Kansas City on the opposite hill, the entrance to the museum was on the north from an oval drive off 45th Street. From either side the Gallery's appearance was that of a restrained, even austere, classical temple.

Part monument, part temple to art, the art museum is also expected to be a vast

storehouse, an exhibitions facility, a public assembly place, and an educational institution. Consequently, . . . the interior was designed as a large loft structure framed in reinforced concrete and steel which could then be divided and organized to provide for the many different functions that had to be served. . . . That [the building] also functions well as an art museum . . . is to the credit of Wight and Wight and later designers of the interior galleries.¹⁸

¹ Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," pp 51-52.

² E.D. Tarbell, "Once — In Our Time," Typescript, 1966, p. 254.

³ George Ehrlich, *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History, 1826-1990*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), p. 63. For Wight see also Wilda Sandy, *Here Lies Kansas City*, (Kansas City: Bennett Schneider, 1984), pp. 160-161; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol V, (Chicago: Marquis - Who's Who), p. 779.

⁴ *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. II, pp. 575-576.

⁵ Tarbell, "Once," p. 255.

⁶ Herbert V. Jones to John E. Wilson, August 1, 1928, John E. Wilson Correspondence, 1928-1935, Nelson-Atkins Museum Archives.

⁷ Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 55.

⁸ Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, June 1, 1929, John E. Wilson Correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA

Archives. For Kendall see *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. I, p. 666.

⁹ Frederic Allen Whiting (1873-1959), first director of the Cleveland Museum of Art (1913-1930); then president of the American Federation of Art (1930-1936). *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, vol. 47, no. 2 (February 1960), p. 18; Bruce Robertson, "Frederic A. Whiting: Founding the Museum with Art and Craft"; Evan H. Turner, ed., *Objects Lessons: Cleveland Creates an Art Museum*, (Cleveland, 1991), pp. 32-59; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. V, p. 776.

¹⁰ John A. Long to Thomas Wight, June 11, 1930, John E. Wilson Correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.

¹¹ *Kansas City Star*, July 16, 1930.

¹² Clarence W. Simpson, longtime superintendent of the Gallery, published in 1976 "A History of the Founding and First Forty Years of The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum of Fine Arts." This useful booklet contains much detail about the Gallery's construction.

¹³ Simpson, "History of the Founding," p. 17.

¹⁴ *Kansas City Star*, May 3, 1931.

¹⁵ *Kansas City Star*, May 18, 1933.

¹⁶ Charles Keck (1875-1951), a pupil of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, had many important commissions for public sculpture. See *Art Digest*, May 1, 1951; Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers* (Poughkeepsie, New York: Apollo Book, 1983), p. 504; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. III, p. 464; and *Who Was Who in American Art*, 1985, p. 329.

¹⁷ The Atkins Stairway was decorated with murals painted by Arthur T. Schwartz, of New York.

¹⁸ Ehrlich, *Kansas City, Missouri*, p. 108.



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1666
Oil on canvas; 31 3/4 x 25 1/2 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [31-75]



T H E C O L L E C T I O N S

At the same time that the new museum building was being planned and built, the University Trustees were tackling the assignment of finding art to put in it. The unique thing about the beginning of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum was that there was no existing collection of art to serve as a nucleus. With the exception of a few paintings from Laura Nelson Kirkwood's estate, the Nelson family did not bequeath a collection to the new Gallery.¹ The same was true of Mary Atkins who had no art to leave her museum. Kansas City did not have collectors who could be asked to contribute art. It was up to the University Trustees to make their own collection. Unless they got to work, the enormous temple of art, which was about to be constructed on the banks of Brush Creek, would be entirely empty.

The Trustees were delayed for two years in their intention of collecting art because of Walter S. Dickey's suit to overturn the sale of the *Kansas City Star*. Until the appeals were settled and the sale affirmed, the Trustees felt they could not commit funds to art purchases. When the Supreme Court of the United States declined in March 1929 to review the case, the burden of Dickey's suit was ended. While the case dragged through the courts, income from Nelson's estate had been accumulating. When the suit was behind them, the Trustees had a fortune to spend. The *Star* reported on May 10, 1930, that \$2,016,482 was available to purchase art, including

the Nelson Trust's income for 1929 which was \$489,648.

The University Trustees established from the beginning two basic policies about the collections. The first was their decision to collect only original works of art and to eschew copies of paintings and casts of sculpture.² The decision to collect only original works was in line with policies at most leading American museums and was made practicable by the availability of original art at the depressed prices of 1930. The second decision was that the art of all ages and civilizations should be collected. This policy seemed sensible because the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum would be the only institution of its kind in the region and might be thought to have an obligation to acquire and display a broad range of art. There was also the insistence on quality: only the finest examples would be acquired for the collection.

The Trustees wisely decided that they were not qualified to choose art for the new Gallery, and from the beginning they had sought the help of experts. They had called upon R.A. Holland of the Kansas City Art Institute to advise them about what works to keep from the Nelson-Kirkwood holdings. In April 1930 Holland was appointed curator, with a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year, to oversee "the various objects of art purchased by the Nelson Trust. Holland would investigate local art and inspect art purchases as well as handle correspondence referred

to him by the Trustees.³ Holland accepted this assignment, but did so reluctantly as he had hoped to be made director of the Gallery. J.C. Nichols explained to him that the Trustees were not in a position to authorize the appointment of a director at that early stage.

Frederic A. Whiting, director of the Cleveland Museum, whom the Trustees had consulted about the building, now helped them also with the task of finding a full-fledged art advisor. Writing to J.C. Nichols, March 8, 1927, Whiting recommended "Mr. Harold Woodbury Parsons who is our European Representative and who, in addition to what he procures for us, is in a position to learn of many important opportunities for purchases abroad. I am sure you will enjoy knowing him and that he can be of service to you in developing the art interest of Kansas City."⁴ It was not until



Harold Woodbury Parsons, cartoon in the Kansas City Star, January 11, 1931.

April 1, 1930, that Parsons was appointed art advisor to the William Rockhill Nelson Trust at a salary of five thousand dollars per year. It was agreed that Parsons would keep his association with the Cleveland Museum of Art; and furthermore that Cleveland would have the first choice of works found by Parsons. The Trustees felt that there would not be a conflict, because the collections at Cleveland were well developed after twenty years of collecting, whereas Kansas City was just starting its collection. Whether this agreement always worked in the best interests of Kansas City may be doubted, but the agent served two masters for some years with

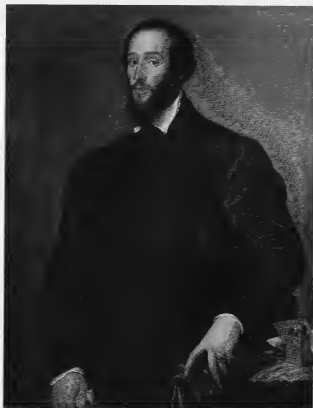
considerable adroitness. In his long association with Kansas City, which lasted from 1930 to 1952, Harold Parsons played a very significant role in shaping the core collection of European art for the new Gallery.

Harold Woodbury Parsons was born in 1883 in Lynn, Massachusetts, and matriculated at Harvard, attending the Lawrence Scientific School, 1901-1903, and the College, 1903-1904, but he did not graduate with the class of 1905. He had a small private income and indulged in travel abroad and study of the fine arts. He became a dealer and an advisor to private collectors — among them Robert Lehman — and to museums. He helped acquire art for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and for the Cloisters in New York. His association with the Cleveland Museum of Art began in 1925. In addition to advising the Nelson Gallery, he later served in a similar capacity for the Joslyn Museum in Omaha and the Philbrook in Tulsa.

When Parsons began his work for Kansas City he was a forty-five year-old bachelor who lived in Boston and maintained an apartment at the Dorset Hotel in New York. Every spring he went to Europe to visit dealers and private collectors. His headquarters were Rome, where he also had an apartment, and his seventy-five foot yacht, "Saharet," which was based at the Royal Italian Yacht Club in Genoa. Parsons' manner of living seemed even more intriguing to readers of the *Kansas City Star* than his frequent pronouncements about art.

Following his appointment Parsons lost no time in seeking art for the new gallery. He urged the formation of a collection based solely on aesthetic considerations and opposed choices which reflected archaeological or historical values. The first group of paintings, which had evidently been acquired earlier by the University Trustees but was not announced until Parsons could pass on them, proved to be an

unremarkable lot. English portraits predominated — Reynolds, Romney, Lely, Hoppner, and Opie, all since sold — along with a good pair of Raeburns and a Dance, which are still in the collection. There was also a satisfactory Rousseau and an over-cleaned Corot, the latter having since been sold also.



Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian, and workshop
Portrait of Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, 1548
 Oil on canvas; 44 1/8 x 34 3/4 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust (30-15)

The next selections, which were announced on May 20, 1930, and for which Parsons was directly responsible, proved more distinguished. Along with antiquities, there were seven paintings: Titian, *Portrait of Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle* (30-15); Millet, *Waiting or Tobit and His Wife* (30-18); Copley, *Portrait of Sir George Cooke, Bart.* (30-19); Gilbert Stuart, *Portrait of the Rt. Hon. John Foster* (30-20); Goya, *Portrait of Don Ignacio O'Mulryan y Rourera* (30-22); Guardi, *View of the Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute* (30-21); and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *The Apparition of the Angel to Hagar and Ishmael* (30-23). Parsons described them all as masterpieces, and the Trustees were reassured to

acquire pictures by such famous names as Titian and Goya. Parsons wrote to Nichols that the Millet pleased Arthur Hyde: "As the Governor expressed it, 'a picture with a great heart-throb in it.'"⁵ The Titian was very expensive, costing nearly \$100,000, but the dealer sweetened the deal by throwing in Melchior Hondecoeter, *Birds Gathered Outside the Gates of a Palace* (30-16). The Copley portrait was later reattributed to Joseph Wright of Derby, and the Tiepolo is now considered to be by the son, Giovanni Domenico, and not by the father. But in general these acquisitions by Parsons have stood the test of time.

Parsons proposed many acquisitions to the Trustees who did not always respond as he hoped. Some paintings they turned down flat as unsuitable or too expensive, and he had to coax and bully them to get them to commit. The Trustees were wary — afraid of buying fakes and of paying too much. Parsons was the enthusiastic guide and tutor but expressed privately, often with sarcasm and condescension, his frustrations with the Trustees' penny-pinching and slowness.

But Parsons pushed ahead. He reported on progress to Bernard Berenson.

The museum in Kansas City now consists of a huge hole in the ground, but a cold, classic mortuary, costing some millions of dollars, will shortly adorn the spot. We can't consider Italian panel pictures until the galleries are built, our temporary shelter being an inferno of an Art Academy. I am bound West tomorrow hoping to persuade my Trustees to expend a million dollars on a few great things now available on the New York market, Rembrandt, Rubens, Hals, etc.⁶

The “inferno” was the Kansas City Art Institute, where the Gallery’s early acquisitions were temporarily displayed for the benefit of the public.

The next week Parsons was quoted in the *Kansas City Star* as saying more art purchases were on their way. “These particular things,” said Mr Parsons, “stand very high in the *oeuvre* of these particular masters. It would be most difficult, if not impossible, to obtain finer works by any of these masters.” He added that he hoped to meet the people of Kansas City “to have, in direct conversation with them, an expression as to the kind of collections they desired.”⁷ It is not recorded whether these conversations ever took place, but certainly he conferred with the Trustees about new purchases.



Nicolas Poussin,
The Triumph of Bacchus, 1635-36
Oil on canvas; 50 1/2 x 59 1/2 inches purchase: Nelson Trust [31-94]

Indeed, notable acquisitions were announced in the succeeding months. Foremost was Rembrandt, *Portrait of a Young Man* (31-75), which was bought from Sir Joseph Duveen for the enormous sum of \$250,000. It had been in the collection of Lord Leconfield at Petworth. Also acquired at the

same time were Frans Hals, *Portrait of A Man* (31-90); Hobbema, *Road in the Woods* (31-76); and Rubens, *Portrait of an Old Man*. Also known as “Old Parr,” the Rubens proved not to be genuine, but the Hals portrait and the Hobbema landscape were admirable choices. The Rembrandt has survived the latter-day scrutiny of The Rembrandt Project and retains a proud place in the collection. Poussin, *The Triumph of Bacchus* (31-94), which had been painted for Cardinal Richelieu and had hung in a noble English collection, was another remarkable acquisition. By the end of 1931 paintings by Cranach, Gainsborough, Turner, El Greco, Murillo, Claude, Greuze, Robert, and Corot, among many other masters, had entered the collection. Harold Parsons summed up progress on a visit to Kansas City by saying that “The nucleus may be called a very good pudding with a few plums in it. Now we shall go slowly, and we hope to find more plums to put in our pudding.”⁸ Not all the purchases were directed by Parsons. It is to the credit of Effie Seachrest, a former art teacher who had opened a gallery in Kansas City, that the Trustees were persuaded to purchase Vincent van Gogh, *The Olive Grove* (32-2).

Meanwhile, J.C. Nichols was counseling caution and advising that art prices might go down even further. Writing to Arthur Hyde, January 20, 1932, after a buying trip to New York, he said that “I want to get into [Parsons’] head that these things may ultimately sell for 10 cents on the dollar. . . . These mighty art dealers are not little gods on pedestals and do not have to be treated with such abject idolatry as he seems to think; . . . they are simply merchants and there is no reason why we should not go after them with hammer and tongs.” Nichols also wanted pictures “with heart appeal and storytelling qualities.” He added that “we are not building a collection for the highbrows and while we do

not want to lower our standards of quality it is up to us to select pictures which will have. . . broad appeal." Art dealers, he added, "don't look any different to me than the farmer who has wheat to sell or the poor real estate man who has property he has to sell at a loss." Nichols concluded by saying that he was "blowing off steam in this letter," but the impression he leaves is that he thoroughly enjoyed jousting with the nabobs of the art trade and had no doubt that he could beat them at their own game.⁹ Despite Nichols' reservations, the Trustees continued to buy. "About \$250,000 worth of art has been bought here recently by the William Rockhill Nelson Trust. . . , according to reports in art circles yesterday."¹⁰

By the time the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum opened in December 1933, Parsons and the Trustees had indeed brought together a more than respectable collection of European paintings and sculpture of the Italian, Netherlandish, Spanish, French, and English schools. In other areas "we have assembled a nucleus of objects of Near Eastern art, not without merit," he wrote later to Berenson. "Our Classical group has grown to a point where one can begin to see, in pretty fine examples, the general outline of ancient art from Dynastic Egypt to Roman times."¹¹

In evaluating Parsons' role in forming the early collection it is well to remember that buying Old Masters was a much less highly developed science than it is today. Art historical scholarship and standards of conservation have advanced greatly in the last sixty years. In addition he had to use skill and patience in working with trustees who were untutored in the field and unused to the art market. Also there were no curators on the museum's staff who could give direction and leadership. All in all, Parsons comes across as astute and conscientious in putting his knowledge about art and the art world at

the service of the University Trustees. He helped them build a collection from scratch in record time. No doubt there were missed opportunities. No doubt too Parsons was vain, condescending, and self-serving. Probably Thomas Hoving's later description of Parsons as "courtly, soft-spoken, witty — and charmingly dishonest" contains an element of truth.¹² By the time Hoving knew him, Parsons had come upon hard times, having worn out his welcome in museum circles. He continued to live in his small flat in Rome at 59 via Sistina where he died May 27, 1967, aged eighty-four.¹³

The connection with the Cleveland Museum of Art, which had led to the association with Harold Woodbury Parsons, also brought the Trustees into contact with Langdon Warner, whose



Langdon Warner

counsel was to prove invaluable in the field of Asian art. On their trip to visit dealers in New York in January 1931, the Trustees met C.T. Loo, the eminent dealer in Chinese art. Parsons arranged for Langdon Warner, then field fellow in Chinese art at the Fogg Museum and formerly an advisor to the Cleveland Museum, to assist the Trustees with purchases from Loo. Warner had met the Nelson

Trustees earlier in 1930 when he had been invited to Kansas City to examine the collection of Chinese art assembled by Captain Frederick H. Pugsley, U.S. Navy, for possible acquisition. The Trustees liked Warner and asked him to visit Kansas City again on his way to the Orient with the idea that he might act as agent for the University Trustees.

During the visit Warner was invited to lunch at the Kansas City Art Institute and "made a very nice impression on everyone he met," according to J.C. Nichols. The Trustees engaged his services to buy art for the Nelson Trust without compensation except for his expenses, which were to be limited to fifteen hundred dollars. A letter of credit for thirty thousand dollars was issued to him for acquisitions. "Mr. Jones and I had a full discussion of the things we thought were most appropriate for purchase and were very enthusiastic about his representing us. Warner makes frequent trips to China and may . . . prove very valuable to us" by effecting "a large saving in the cost of objects of art by dealing directly with China. . . ."¹⁴

Langdon Warner was a member of the class of 1903 at Harvard, and after graduation began his life's work by going on an archaeological expedition to Turkestan. In 1906 he and John E. Lodge were recommended by Harvard to be trained by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for museum work in the Asian department. The program included study and travel in Japan and China. In due time Warner and Lodge became two of the earliest experts in America on the arts of Asia, the latter serving as the first director of the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C. Warner was assistant curator of Asian art at Boston from 1906 to 1913, and during this period he made a number of archaeological expeditions to Asia. He was director of the Pennsylvania Museum from 1917 to 1923, but then decided to return to

Harvard and the Fogg Museum to teach and to continue his research.¹⁵ His trip in 1931 was his eighth to the Far East where he intended to pursue his research in Japan for the Fogg, now coupled with the assignment to buy art in China for Kansas City.

Warner reached Peking in May 1931, and began acquiring paintings, pottery, bronzes, and stone sculptures for the Nelson Trust. He tried to find architectural elements which might serve to recreate a palace or temple in one of the vast gal-



*Laurence Sickman, left, en route to Peking, fall 1930
(NAMA Archives)*

leries being constructed in Kansas City. He began negotiations for sections of "an eighteenth century palace built by a brother of the Emperor . . . [which] is remarkable for its extraordinarily beautiful and simple proportions and its brilliant green tile roof."¹⁶ The negotiations could not be concluded before he left Peking for Japan.

Happily the thing could be left in the hands of Sickman, an ex-student of mine, who will put through the interminable negotiations necessary. Naturally he will cost us nothing for his services. His taste and judgment are as good as mine and he speaks Chinese

better than I. After a year or two more training I shall suggest his name to the Director of the K. C. Museum as prime timber for an Oriental Curator.¹⁷

This reference to Laurence Sickman was the first mention of the name of the man who was to become the most significant influence in the formation of the Asian collections of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum. Sickman and another former student in Tientsin both “knocked off work to go about with me and were invaluable in their knowledge of the art and the dealers. . . . I could not have accomplished half so much in my month if it hadn’t been for their untiring kindness.”¹⁸ After graduating from Harvard in June 1930, Laurence Sickman had gone to China to do graduate work on one of the new Harvard-Yenching Fellowships for which Langdon Warner had recommended him. Now Warner recruited Sickman to help him acquire Chinese art for the Nelson Trust.

Their first project of acquiring the palace fell through, but word from a German dealer soon led to the discovery of a Ming temple ceiling. “It looks as though we have landed about the best possible bit of Chinese architecture left undestroyed in that collapsing country,” Warner wrote in his next letter to Nichols. With deep coffres and carved decoration of *nan mu* wood, “it fits together without a nail, and the carpentry is superb. . . . It seems to retain its original Ming gold. Please tell them in Kansas City to dust it carefully but for God’s sake not to wash it. It has acquired a beautiful soft patina.”¹⁹ The ceiling was from the Ch’ih-hua Temple in Peking and was built in 1444 by Wang Chin, one of the Emperor’s eunuchs. After considerable difficulty Sickman was able to export the ceiling, which is now one of the glories of the Chinese Temple Gallery in Kansas City.

When Warner and Sickman were not pursuing architectural prizes, they were looking for art, and they had the amazing good fortune to obtain access to the Imperial collection of paintings. The last Emperor of China, P’u-yi (Hsüan t’ung), had been left in possession of the Imperial Palace and all its contents after the revolution of 1912. Before he was driven into exile in Tientsin in 1924, he had sent out a number of paintings, many of them handscrolls, which the two men were able to inspect. Warner wrote to Nichols, saying that “when I come back I will retail to you the drama of my three visits to the little ex-Emperor who is in half-custody, living meanly in the Japanese concession at Tientsin.”²⁰



Chinese Temple Ceiling, carved nan-mu wood, 1444.

These visits were followed up by Sickman. “I have another line on H.I.M.’s [His Imperial Majesty’s] pictures through Miss Purnett’s man Chin. He also has access to the paintings of Prince Too Po-La from whose collection H.I.M.’s pictures were taken, it seems. . . . It makes me feel very smart when [Chinese museum officials] with hushed voices say ‘What treasures do you suppose the Emperor has,’



Laurence Sickman, Loyal, 1932.

and I sit and keep still and think of our glorious days."²¹ Sickman recounted later that P'u-yi "had a nice English lady who was his tutor, and [she indicated that the Emperor] would like to sell some things because he needed the cash. . . . P'u-yi wasn't interested in paintings. He had just bought that damn new motorcycle, and he would go out and try his motorcycle and then come back in and look over our shoulders and then go back to his motorcycle. We bought three or four paintings at that time directly. They were the first paintings we acquired — directly from the Emperor."²²

When Langdon Warner left China he turned over to Laurence Sickman the unspent

Nelson funds and instructed him to look out for things for the museum in Kansas City. For the next two years Sickman acted as agent for the University Trustees. He would find pieces and send descriptions and photos to Langdon Warner who would in turn recommend their purchase to the Trustees. If the Trustees approved, they would cable the money. In the chaotic conditions of the early 1930s dealers in Peking were not always willing to hold objects on approval. Both dealers and consignors wanted immediate cash for sales. The approval system was slow and awkward and was frustrating to Sickman. As the Trustees came to trust his judgment more and more, money was cabled more freely to him in Peking. Langdon Warner retired from his post as advisor in 1933, though the Trustees continued to consult him on an informal basis. Sickman returned to China after the opening of the Museum in December of that year, and thereafter he dealt directly with the Trustees.

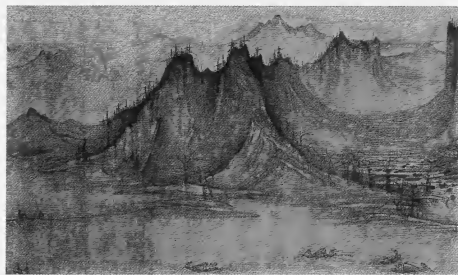
Throughout his years in China, Sickman's goal, supported by the Nelson Trustees, was to collect objects from the whole range of Chinese civilization.

China was the only country in which it was still possible to illustrate with works of art of good quality the entire evolution of the civilization. . . . The Chinese have the longest continuous cultural history of any nation in the world. Babylon, Egypt, Syria were all gone. The Chinese were still going — same language, same culture, same forms of government, same ideas. . . . The continuity was marvelous. The collection starts out with neolithic pots about 3500 B.C. and goes on down to about 1850.²³



*Ritual Disc with Dragon Motif, type pi, 4th/3rd century B.C.
Jade (nephrite); diameter: 6 1/2 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust (33-81)*

In acquiring art Sickman had the help of Otto Burchard, a German art historian and dealer then living in Peking. Burchard had a gallery in Berlin and an agent in New York, but he preferred to deal directly with Sickman. "He had a real underground in Peking. He would hear about things. I was supposed to be a student, not just running around Peking, [but] Burchard would make the contact" and they would visit the dealer together.²⁴ On some occasions Burchard would buy the object until



Hsü Tao-ning, Fishermen's Evening Song (section), c. 1049 Handscroll; ink and slight color on silk; 19 x 82 1/2 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust (33-1559)

Warner could give his approval. Sometimes Warner didn't approve, and the objects would then be sent to New York to be sold by Burchard's agent there, to Sickman's great disgust. No purchase was ever concluded without endless bargaining. Competition from other agents was stiff. Sometimes the rarity and quality of the object were so great "that you had to stay there until you bought it, sometimes two or three hours, drinking gallons of tea and talking and haggling . . . Our big jade disc, for example, took hours to buy."²⁵

The scene of these negotiations was Liu-li Ch'ang Street in Peking which attracted a knowledgeable clientele of scholars and antiquarians.

Throughout its winding length there were famous shops dealing in books, rubbings, paper, ink, brushes and all the paraphernalia of the scholar's desk, while other shops offered the widest variety of art and antiquities. Among the proprietors of these shops were men possessing much knowledge about the history and antiquities of their country, and who. . .were tolerant and generous enough to share their learning and experience with a neophyte.²⁶

The year 1933 saw not only the acquisition of the jade *pi* (33-81), the ritual disc which the Gallery's current director Marc Wilson has described as "the single most famous jade carving," but also the purchase of the *Fishermen's Evening Song* (33-1559), a handscroll by the eleventh-century artist Hsü Tao-ning.

Sickman was awakened in the middle of the night by a runner from a prince's palace, offering the scroll and one

other upon the condition that they be bought immediately for cash. No matter the late hour, Sickman rushed to a friend's house to borrow the money rather than let the opportunity slip by. . . .He never knew for certain from whom he had bought this raw and powerful Northern Sung landscape, but speculates that a gambling loss caused its sale.²⁷

The timely help of Sickman's friend recalls his associations with an interesting circle of scholars and visitors who were in Peking in the early 1930s. There were other distinguished recipients of Harvard-Yenching Fellowships, including John King Fairbank, the scholar of modern China, and Edwin Reischauer, the historian and ambassador to Japan. The Harvard-Yenching Fellows were supervised by a Harvard professor in residence, Baron de Staël Holstein, an eccentric scholar who was an authority on Buddhism. Harold Acton also lived in Peking then.

I met several Americans who surprised me with their profound intuitive understanding of Chinese art. Among these the finest connoisseur was Laurence Sickman, whose culture was Chinese, even though he had been born in Denver, Colorado. Some of the most splendid moments of the day were when Laurence walked in with some treasure he had discovered, and he was constantly discovering treasures, from Chou bronzes to jade cicadas, for the fantastically fortunate Kansas City museum. . . .In his hands they glowed like sleeping princesses at

the wakening touch of a Prince Charming, . . .but after a brief honeymoon they were sent to sleep again behind the glass cases of the gallery in Missouri.²⁸

At a later date Osbert Sitwell came for an extended stay in China, which he wrote about in a travel book that he dedicated to Sickman and two other Peking friends.²⁹ Other scholars who were friends at this period in Peking were Herrlee G. Creel, Derk Bodde, Gustav Ecke, and Oswald Siren.

Since Sickman's meeting with Langdon Warner in May 1931 his collecting activities had never slackened; indeed, the pace of expenditure and acquisition increased each year. By the time Sickman made his first visit to Kansas City to attend the opening of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum in December 1933, he had assembled a collection of Chinese art remarkable for its range and quality. The art included bronze vessels, mirrors, swords, and utilitarian objects; jade carvings; the Han House Model; Buddhist sculpture, including figures, friezes, and steles; T'ang dynasty clay figures; paintings from the Sung to the Ch'ing dynasties; Ming and Ch'ing dynasty porcelains; examples of Ming furniture; and the great wall painting and the Ming dynasty ceiling and screens, which together made up the Chinese Temple. This core collection has been enriched over the years by acquisitions which have made it one of the three or four outstanding collections of Asian art in the United States.

The Trustees were somewhat slower in moving into the field of American art. In January 1933, they appointed as their advisor Charles O. Cornelius, associate curator of American art at the Metropolitan Museum. He was an architect and an expert on New York furniture who had helped to

install the American wing at the Metropolitan.³⁰ Cornelius guided the Nelson Trustees in completing the suite of American period rooms and the furnishings to go in them. The drawing room from "The Lindens," a mansion built in 1754 in Danvers, Massachusetts, and a Philadelphia highboy were notable purchases. By the date of the opening, five period rooms had been reconstructed to show the development of American decorative arts, painting, and architecture.

The Trustees did not neglect Native American art. From the Heye Foundation they acquired in 1931 and 1932 approximately three hundred objects, consisting mainly of beaded costumes and other material from the Great Plains and Western plateau and also California baskets. The next year they purchased from Fred Harvey two large

collections of historic pottery and Navajo textiles.

Thus, in a span of three years the University Trustees, with the help of their advisors, had acquired an amazingly extensive and diverse collection of more than five thousand objects which sufficed to fill thirty galleries on two floors in the east wing of the new building. Altogether they had spent more than \$4 million on art between March 1930 and December 1933. Thanks to Nelson's generosity and his conservative investment policy, the Trustees had had cash to spend at the depth of the Depression, and they had tried to make the most of their opportunities in the art market. They also had begun to assemble a small staff and to make plans for opening the museum to a public eager to see for themselves what treasures the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum contained.

¹ R.A. Holland, director of the Kansas City Art Institute, was asked to advise the Trustees in selecting art from Oak Hall to be saved for the new museum. On his advice the Trustees retained two Impressionist paintings, Claude Monet, *View of Argenteuil — Snow* (44-4 1/3), Camille Pissarro, *Poplars, Sunset at Eragny* (44-41/2) and a portrait on panel by Marcus Gheeraerts, *Frances Knyvett* (34-308/4). The portrait of William Rockhill Nelson, painted by William Merritt Chase in 1907, was also kept, along with a bust of Nelson by an unknown sculptor. At a later date Mrs. David M. Lighton gave a pastel by Edgar Degas, *After the Bath* (35-39/1), which had belonged to the Nelsons. These are the only major works with Nelson provenance now in the collection.

² However, it was agreed to keep and display the copies from Nelson's Western Gallery of Art, which were shown in what is now the Chinese painting gallery on the second floor of the new museum, until 1942.

³ Wolfman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 67.

⁴ Frederic A. Whiting to J.C. Nichols, March 8, 1927, Parsons file, NAMA Archives.

⁵ Harold Parsons to J.C. Nichols, April 23, 1930, Parsons file, NAMA Archives. Arthur M. Hyde (1877-1947), governor of Missouri from 1921 to 1925 and then serving in President Hoover's cabinet as secretary of agriculture, had been appointed University Trustee in 1929. He succeeded William Volker, who resigned in order to devote all his energies to establishing the new University of Kansas City.

⁶ Harold Parsons to Bernard Berenson, December 29, 1930, Berenson Archive, Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. I am indebted to Dr. Eliot Rowlands for bringing to my attention this letter and other material in the Berenson Archive.

⁷ *Kansas City Star*, January 6, 1931.

⁸ *Kansas City Times*, January 12, 1932.

⁹ J.C. Nichols to Arthur M. Hyde, January 30, 1932, Parsons file, NAMA Archives.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, February 4, 1933.

¹¹ Harold Parsons to Bernard Berenson, April 6, 1935, the Berenson Archive, Villa I Tatti.

¹² Thomas Hoving, *King of the Confessors* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 165.

¹³ *The New York Times*, May 29, 1967, p. 25. For Parsons' career see, besides Hoving, David Sox, *Bachelors of Art: Edward Perry Warren and the Lewes House Brotherhood* (London: Trafalgar, 1991), pp. 211-248; William Mathewson Milliken, *Born Under the Sign of Libra: An Autobiography* (Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1977), pp. 85-87. Milliken gives an entertaining account of the occasion on which Parsons had as his guest the Bey of Tunis and his suite on board *Saharet*, and then sold the boat to him the next day at a large profit.

¹⁴ Memorandum, J.C. Nichols to Sybil Brelsford, March 16, 1931, NAMA Archives.

¹⁵ Theodore Bowie, ed., *Langdon Warner Through His Letters* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966); George and Mary Roberts, *Triumph on Fairmount: Fiske Kimball and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1959), pp.44-45; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. III, p.891.

¹⁶ Langdon Warner to J.C. Nichols, undated [June 1931?], NAMA Archives.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Langdon Warner to J.C. Nichols, July 28, 1931, NAMA Archives.

²⁰ Langdon Warner to J.C. Nichols, undated [June 1931?], NAMA Archives.

²¹ Laurence Sickman to Langdon Warner, August 13, 1931, NAMA Archives.

²² Interview with Laurence Sickman by Michael Churchman, January 14, 1983; quoted in Churchman, ed., *Laurence Sickman: A Tribute* (Kansas City: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1988), p. 29.

²³ Interview with Laurence Sickman by Michael Churchman, January 14, 1983.

²⁴ Interview with Laurence Sickman by Michael Churchman, December 2, 1982.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Memorandum by Laurence Sickman, quoted in Denys Sutton, "The Lure of Ancient China," *Apollo*, March 1973, p.10.

²⁷ Stephen Addiss, "Hills and Valleys Within: Laurence Sickman and the Oriental Collection," *Oriental Art*, Summer 1978, p. 229.

²⁸ Sir Harold Acton, *Memoirs of an Aesthete* (London: Methuen & Co., 1948), pp. 323-324. See also Edward Chaney and Neil Ritchie, eds., *Oxford China and Italy: Writings in Honour of Sir Harold Acton on his Eightieth Birthday* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), pp. 69-79.

²⁹ Sir Osbert Sitwell, *Escape With Me!* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1939).

³⁰ Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989), pp. 199-200; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. I, p. 261.

*The Trustees
of the
William Rockhill Nelson Trust
request the honor of your presence
at a Preview of
The Opening Exhibition
in the
William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art
and the
Atkins Museum of Art
on Sunday, the tenth of December
from eight until eleven o'clock
in the evening*

*The favor of a reply
is requested to
Mr. Paul Gardner, Director
1525 Oak Street
Kansas City, Missouri*

*Trustees
Mr. Jesse Clyde Nichols
Mr. Herbert Vincent Jones
Mr. Arthur Masick Hyde*

IV

T H E O P E N I N G

The year 1932 marked a new phase in the creation of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum. Construction had reached a point where the building was closed in and work on the interior had begun. Shipments of art were being received in ever increasing numbers, with some paintings and sculpture going on temporary display at the Kansas City Art Institute and all other works going into storage. The pace of events was beginning to take a toll on the University Trustees, especially J.C. Nichols and Herbert Jones, who had been extraordinarily active and diligent in overseeing all these activities. They began to feel the need of a staff to assist them in handling the day-to-day business of the new Gallery.

The easiest way for Nichols and Jones to get relief from the Gallery's daily demands would have been to appoint a director. But, cautious as always about expense and lacking experience in finding museum leaders, they put off this step. Instead they announced in March 1932, the appointment of Paul Gardner as assistant to the Trustees. Evidently it was their plan to have a trial period with Gardner who, it was reported, was "engaged on the advice of Harold Woodbury Parsons."¹ As it turned out, Gardner took hold of the job immediately and enjoyed the challenge of finishing the building, installing the collections, and organizing the Gallery's first programs. Indeed he was destined to leave his stamp on the early development of the institution.

Paul Gardner was a graduate student at the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, when he was appointed to the position in Kansas City. He was born October 20, 1894, in Somerville, Massachusetts, and graduated with a major in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the class of 1917. He went immediately into the U.S. Army and served in France from November 1917 until the Armistice a year later. He was made captain and awarded the Croix de Guerre with palms for heroism in the Meuse-Argonne campaign. After the War he travelled in France, Spain, and North Africa before returning to the United States in 1919. During the next eight or nine years Gardner entered on a wholly new career, dancing with Pavlova's Ballet Company and adopting the stage name of Paul Tchernikoff. At some point he decided to pursue his interests in art and history and went to graduate school, receiving the master's degree in European history from George Washington University in 1928. In the fall of 1930 he enrolled in the doctoral program in art history at Harvard where his dissertation topic was the history of European museums. His appointment in Kansas City at the age of thirty-seven marked the end of his formal studies, but it opened the opportunity for a professional career in museum work.²

Gardner immediately plunged into the work of organizing the Gallery, operating at first from the Nelson Trust office in the Bryant Building and later

commandeering one of the rooms in the unfinished museum. He had to oversee the completion of all the galleries, including lighting and wall-covering and the selection of moldings and marble bases. The Chinese Temple Gallery was a project in itself, involving the installation of the panels of the huge fresco and the erection of the Ming temple ceiling and screens. Equally challenging was the suite of five American period rooms whose varied dimensions had to be fitted into the allotted space on the second floor. All of these projects required daily consultations with the builder and frequent meetings with the Trustees.

At the same time shipments of art were arriving daily and needed to be unpacked and registered.³ Besides looking after the growing collections Gardner also became the Gallery's spokesman, talking frequently to the press, addressing civic groups, and giving lectures on art history. At the time of his appointment he assured the public that there was no danger that the Gallery would present "an empty or barn-like appearance when it is opened next year."⁴ Two weeks later he gave a lecture with colored slides to the Women's Chamber of Commerce using a new projection machine, which brought the artists' colors to life. Nearer the date of the Gallery's opening he was promoting attendance. "I don't believe the public wants a dead or static museum," he said. "We shall endeavor by frequent changes of objects and constant rearrangements, by giving them a commanding setting and interpretation, to make people feel they must visit the gallery at least once a month."⁵ Gardner was engaged, in short, in all those activities of outreach and education that are such an important part of the leadership of an art museum.

Gardner's work clearly met with the Trustees' approval, and he was named director of

the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum as of September 1, 1933, at a salary of three hundred dollars per month. The Trustees also authorized him to appoint a skeleton staff. Ethlyne Jackson, an art history student from the University of Kansas who also had office skills, was appointed secretary in August 1933. The Trustees were conscious that they had to have someone to oversee the building when the Long Construction Company turned it over to them. Earlier, in the spring of 1933, George Herrick, a Nichols Company foreman, was put in charge of the boilers and all the electrical and mechanical systems. He was also given the job of unpacking all the crates of art as they arrived at the west door. As Lindsay Hughes Cooper recalled, "After a month of pipe and collection juggling, even Mr. Nichols could see that there were two jobs involved. You can't be in the boiler room and at the west door at the same time. So the Long Construction Company sent out their man, Clarence Simpson, as engineer, and Clarence later became general building superintendent."⁶ Both Herrick and Simpson became longtime staff members who set high standards of professional service to the Gallery.

Gardner also needed assistants to tackle some of the curatorial tasks which had to be done if the installations were going to be ready for the opening. Lindsay Hughes, who had been besieging Gardner for eighteen months asking for a job, was hired in September 1933 at the munificent salary of ten dollars per week. On her first morning, "Frankie Askew and I were escorted to First Storage, shown needles, thread, and a Persian rug whose black stripes needed repair. . . . We dusted all of Mr. Kevorkian's pottery. . . and we washed all of Mrs. Hamilton Fish's glass." These were both collections which had been

lent to the opening. They polished andirons, washed a rock crystal chandelier, and reupholstered a chair. Lindsay Hughes also wrote educational booklets and gave lectures. Other early staff members were two members of the class of 1933 at Harvard, Philip Beam and Otto Wittmann Jr., who began their professional lives at the new Gallery. After two years in Kansas City, Beam went on to a distinguished career as scholar and museum director at Bowdoin College. Wittmann, a native of Kansas City who was the Gallery's first registrar, later became director of the Toledo Museum of Art and is now a trustee of the Getty Museum. As the opening approached Gardner recruited guards from the student body at the Art Institute, and Beam trained them so that they could double as gallery guides.

The focus of everyone's efforts — Trustees, staff, contractors — was the long-awaited opening of the museum. It was announced in September that the date would be sometime in December, to coincide with the arrival in Kansas City of the famous canvas, *Whistler's Mother*, otherwise called *Arrangement in Grey and Black*. The Louvre had lent it to the Century of Progress Exposition, the world's fair in Chicago. After its stay there it went on tour to a number of American cities, including Kansas City. Many other works were borrowed for the opening from museums and dealers, but Whistler's painting, along with George Bellows, *The Stag at Sharkey's*, from the Cleveland Museum, got the most press. Finally the Trustees and Paul Gardner announced that the public opening would be held on Monday, December 11, 1933, and that there would be a reception for invited guests the preceding Sunday evening, December 10.

The excitement and pressures of that fall are best caught in an eight-page memorandum that

was evidently composed by Sybil Brelsford, the Nelson Trust's secretary, from notes and dictation by J.C. Nichols and Herbert Jones. "Between



Whistler's Mother, being installed for the opening, December 1933; left, standing, Robert Lockhart; kneeling, Otto Wittmann Jr.; right, standing, George Herrick; kneeling, Philip Beam; standing at right, Paul Gardner (NAMA Archives)

November 17th and December 30th, 1933, regular meetings of the Board were dispensed with," it begins, "because almost daily and sometimes several times a day Mr. Nichols and Mr. Jones were in conference at the gallery while attending to matters getting ready for the opening." The Trustees met with the director and the staff, supervised final work by the various contractors, and reviewed plans for placement of the art. Press conferences were frequently held. "For some three weeks prior to the opening of the gallery Mr. Nichols and Mr. Jones were at the gallery every night until midnight and frequently back there by eight the following morning."

A great deal of time was devoted to the list of persons to be invited to the Sunday evening reception on December 10. "Mr. Nichols set up a

staff of girls varying from five to thirteen," the memorandum continues, and put them in charge of his secretary with the job of preparing the invitation list. "Every social and business list of Kansas City was collected and studied," including those of clubs and the Chamber of Commerce. A list of newspaper editors in Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma was made, and lists of the faculties of educational institutions were also collected. The Kansas City Art Institute, the University of Kansas City, the Liberty Memorial Association, the Athenaeum, and the Ministerial Alliance also furnished names. In spite of all these consultations the memorandum records that "Many unpleasant circumstances arose, caused by people becoming disgruntled because they were not invited, and for two weeks prior to the opening a great deal of diplomacy was required to handle such complaints. . . . Some very delicate matters arose in handling the reception [to make]. . . city officials feel that they were not being overlooked." The Trustees concluded that on the whole "the invitation list was well and accurately handled, and that it brought the right kind of people to the gallery."⁷

In the meantime the *Kansas City Star* advised its readers how to prepare to enjoy the new museum, how to behave in the galleries, and even what to wear to the opening. Visitors were urged to read art books. Helen Gardner, *Understanding the Arts*, Morris Davidson, *Understanding Modern Art*, and Thomas Craven, *Men of Art* were among the titles recommended by Paul Gardner who gave frequent public lectures during that fall. The public was advised that once in the galleries "museum fatigue" could be thwarted by "using the comfortable upholstered chairs [which] abound in the Gallery's three lounge rooms which are equipped with reading

lamps and art magazines."⁸ The article continued that it is anticipated that "Kansas City quickly will acquire 'museum manners.' Nothing must be touched. . . . The Trustees hope that it will not be necessary to mar the gallery's symphony of studied effects with 'Do Not Touch' signs."⁹ Readers were also advised about what to wear to the museum. It was reported that, following the customs of such Eastern centers of culture as New York and Boston, formal dress of white tie and tails would be observed by the Trustees at the opening party and ladies would also wear formal dress, though more casual attire would certainly be acceptable. In matters of dress and etiquette "the Middle West observes but does not agonize over these points," the story concluded.¹⁰

The Trustees had deliberately chosen Monday, a working day, for the opening as a means of controlling the size of the crowds. Even with this precaution, elaborate arrangements were made for managing the throngs which were anticipated. The city assigned forty police officers to handle traffic and parking. Girls from the Art Institute were recruited to sell catalogues and to give directions. Their efforts were reinforced by twenty-five Boy Scouts who volunteered to serve as guides, while members of the Junior League were stationed in the galleries to tell visitors about the art. Three days before the opening a reporter trailed after Philip Beam as he trained the guards. "Whenever a visitor loses his way," Mr. Beam told the guards, "direct him to the checking office near the north entrance, for everything lost or found will be reported there, whether animate or inanimate."¹¹

Meanwhile, Nichols' staff of girls was busy recording acceptances for the reception on Sunday evening, December 10, and sending lists to the

newspapers. Many notables had been invited, including the president of the United States and his cabinet. Secretary Hyde, though out of office after the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, had assisted in making lists of other high officials and had provided the names of the congressional delegations from Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. A few politicians accepted the Trustees' invitation, but the art world was better represented than the political arena at the opening. The directors of the museums at Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Omaha all accepted. But the largest of the art contingents were the dealers from New York who came en masse. Many of them had loaned paintings or other works for the opening and were anxious to extol the merits of their pieces to the Trustees, who might be persuaded to buy them for the permanent collection. In many instances Harold Parsons had arranged the loans and reported to Paul Gardner that a horde of dealers "will be starting the long Westward trek in covered Pullman wagons."¹² Preeminent among them was the erstwhile Sir Joseph Duveen who had lately been elevated to the peerage as Baron Duveen of Millbank. C.T. Loo, Pierre Durand-Ruel, Israel Sack, Ralph M. Chait, John Levy, H. Kervorkian, Jacob Hirsch, Charles Herschel, Robert C. Vose, Felix Wildenstein, B.M. Newhouse, and Germain Seligman also boarded the train to Kansas City. "There was a story — probably apocryphal — of a poker game en route, the players being the Armenian H. Kevorkian, the Jewish Israel Sack, and the Chinese C.T. Loo. . . . Lord Duveen stayed with the Nicholsons and infuriated Mrs. Nicholsons by bringing his own silk sheets."¹³

The lists of guests who accepted contained some interesting names, including Judge and Mrs.



Harold Woodbury Parsons, Kansas City, December 1933.



Lord Duveen of Millbank, Kansas City, December 1933.



C.T.Loo (NAMA Archives)

Harry S. Truman from Independence, the artist Birger Sandzen from Lindsborg, Kansas, the sculptor Charles Keck from New York, and Associate Justice Owen Roberts and his wife from Washington. The Trustees' art advisors, Harold Woodbury Parsons and Charles O. Cornelius, also came from New York.

The Trustees had been anxious for some time to meet Laurence Sickman, and they invited him to come from Peking for the opening. The staff was also curious to meet Sickman, whose shipments from China they had been unpacking and cataloguing for months. Lindsay Hughes Cooper remembers her first encounter with Sickman:

Ethlyne [Jackson] had told me Sickman was coming from Peking, the man who bought these many things which had been arriving. I knew nothing of his background, but figured he must be pretty old to get to China. One morning as I passed her office, she called and said, "Sickman is here."

"What does he look like? Does he have a beard?"

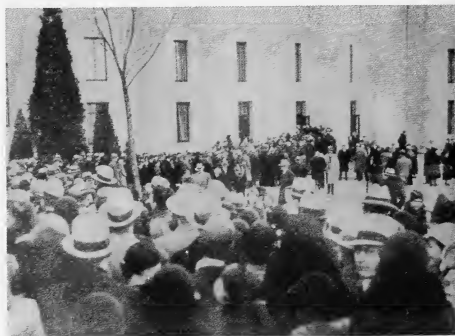
"Go see — he is around at the West Door."

A lot was going on at the West Door —workmen, a delivery truck, but no old man from China. I asked John Gwynne, the doorman, and he nodded to the side. I couldn't believe it. There was a man in a trench coat, with turned up collar, who looked like the

rest of us — just out of college. It was Sickman of China.¹⁴

It was Laurence Sickman's first visit to the Nelson Gallery, whose development he was to influence so profoundly over the next half century.

Festivities began on Sunday evening, December 10, with a dinner at the Kansas City Country Club hosted by the University Trustees. The preview from 8:30 to 11:00 followed at the Gallery. Two thousand people came in their best



Lines outside the Gallery, opening day, December 11, 1933.

dress to the long-awaited gala evening. The next day, Monday, December 11, the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum opened its doors at 10 a.m. A crowd of 7,950 people toured the new building until 4:00 p.m. when the formal dedication took place. The ceremony was broadcast live from Atkins Auditorium on radio station WDAF with an NBC hookup to more than forty stations throughout the country. The newly formed Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Karl Kreuger, made its national debut, playing the first and second movements of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

The speakers were E.H. Lindley, chancellor of the University of Kansas, Paul Gardner, and J.C. Nichols. Nichols acknowledged the community's debt to William Rockhill Nelson and extolled the beauty and distinction of the collection which Nelson's funds had bought. He encouraged everyone to avail himself of the inspiration and joy of the new gallery.

Art is not a fancy or a fad. It is a vital force in the lives of us all. Art is never sterile. Always rugged, it surges through every activity from education to commerce, yet it is as tender as the smile on a baby's face.

No man need be ashamed because he feels a tug at his heart string and a tear glistens in his eye as he stands before objects of art which grip his soul. . . . Every lovely curve, every exacting proportion is the product of a hand driven by a high desire to create a better standard. . . . May this collection be a constant influence in your life.

Nichols concluded his address with this peroration:

May these halls become a rallying place for high ideals and aspirations; may they crystalize a greater love for beauty; may they be a happy, democratic meeting place for all groups, all races, all creeds, all men, who call the middle west their home.¹⁵

Earlier that afternoon Mrs. Edwin W. Shields had given a tea at her handsome, English-

style house at 5110 Cherry Street. That evening Mr. and Mrs. Frederick H. Harvey gave a dinner for guests of the Trustees at their house which was adjacent to the Gallery at 4538 Warwick Boulevard.¹⁶

No admission was charged during the first week, and every day crowds streamed into the Gallery. In an effort to space out visitors, Monday and Tuesday, December 11 and 12, were designated as Kansas City, Missouri, Days; Wednesday as Kansas City, Kansas, Day; Thursday as Suburban Day; Friday and Saturday as Children's Days; and Sunday, December 17, as a day for the whole community, whose members took up the invitation in record num-



Crowds looking at Whistler's Mother, December 11, 1933.

ber. "On an art rampage nearly 11,000 persons jammed the gallery in the four hours between 1 and 5 in the afternoon," the *Kansas City Star* reported.¹⁷ For part of the afternoon the line reached almost to 45th Street, and the doors had to be closed three times to restrain the crowd which waited patiently in the cold wind. By the end of December it was estimated that 100,000 people had visited the Gallery.

During opening week several prominent visitors filled speaking engagements. Lord Duveen, who did not fancy himself a public speaker even

though he was renowned as a persuasive talker with collectors, was enlisted to address a luncheon meeting of a thousand women and apparently survived the experience. Harold Woodbury Parsons spoke to the Cooperative Club. Many of the distinguished visitors returned several times to see and to praise the Gallery's collections and the building. " 'Like a pupil that has outstripped its teacher, so has Kansas City passed New York in the ability to create something marvelously beautiful,' was the verdict pronounced by John Levy."¹⁸ Efreim Zimbalist, who was visiting Kansas City as soloist with the Philharmonic Orchestra, gave a laudatory interview about the Gallery's treasures.¹⁹

The national media also accorded generous recognition to Kansas City's achievement.²⁰ "At the opening not only justly proud citizens of Kansas City but visitors from afar will inspect and admire the new building and the collections . . . Already it appears that Kansas City is to have a museum in the great tra-

dition and the grand manner."²¹ The *Literary Digest* called the Gallery "the crown of [Nelson's] work for his city."²² "The *Museums Journal* summed up the general sentiment: 'The collection of Old Masters which has been acquired is a most remarkable one and probably no such public collection has been brought together in so short a time.'²³ The greatest accolade was given by the *Art Digest*, which devoted its whole issue to the new Gallery.²⁴

In the depth of the Depression, thanks to generous philanthropists and energetic trustees, Kansas City had created in three years an art museum of national stature. It is notable that in the same year that the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum opened two other important cultural and educational organizations were founded, the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra and the University of Kansas City. Nelson's dream of a great regional center, which offered enlightenment to its citizens, was about to be abundantly realized.

¹ *Kansas City Times*, March 5, 1932.

² *Who's Who in American Art*, 1962, p. 218; Lindsay Hughes Cooper, "Paul Gardner as I Knew Him," typescript, 1986; Gardner files, NAMA Archives. Always called "P.G." by the staff at the Gallery, his name in full was Joseph Paul de Grasse Gardner.

³ The Gallery adopted the system of registering each work of art by assigning to it a double number. For example, the number 30 - 1 indicates that the object was the first one accessioned in the year 1930. An Assyrian clay nailhead from Tell-en-Nasbeh of the second millennium B.C. has the honor of holding the first accession number in the Gallery's collection.

⁴ *Kansas City Times*, March 5, 1932.

⁵ *Kansas City Star*, September 14, 1933.

⁶ Lindsay Hughes Cooper, "A Night of Remembrance," Typescript, November 15, 1983.

⁷ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, November 17 - December 31, 1933. NAMA Archives.

⁸ *Kansas City Star*, December 3, 1933.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Kansas City Star*, December 7, 1933.

¹¹ *Kansas City Star*, December 7, 1933.

¹² Harold Parsons to Paul Gardner, November 24, 1933, NAMA Archives.

¹³ Cooper, "Remembrances," p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ "Dedicatory Talk by J.C. Nichols on the Occasion of the Opening of the W.R. Nelson Collection of Art," NAMA Archives.

¹⁶ The Shields house became in 1955 home to the elementary grades of the Barstow School and was sold in 1962 to the University of Kansas City. It is now the Henry W. Bloch School of Business Administration. The Harvey house was for many years owned by the John R. Cunningham family and still stands on the west side of Southmoreland Park.

¹⁷ *Kansas City Star*, December 18, 1933.

¹⁸ *Kansas City Star*, December 13, 1933.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *New York Times*, December 11, 1933, p. 24.

²¹ *American Magazine of Art*, December 1933, p. 523.

²² *Literary Digest*, December 30, 1933, p. 21.

²³ *Museums Journal*, February 1934, p. 417, quoted in Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 111.

²⁴ "Like Helmeted Minerva, Springs Kansas City's New Art Museum," *Art Digest*, December 1, 1933, pp. 11-37.



Paul Gardner, photograph by Strauss Peyton (NAMA Archives).

EARLY YEARS UNDER PAUL GARDNER

As the new year 1934 dawned, and as the echo of the opening-weeks' crowds died away, the new Nelson Gallery - Atkins Museum faced the challenge of how to build an audience. An art gallery was a novelty to which visitors might come once out of curiosity, but would they return? Paul Gardner was committed to the goal of making the Gallery the center of the community's cultural and artistic life. He believed that education was a proper role for the Gallery to play "not only to serve the public but also to get people into the museum."¹

Gardner and his small staff set to work to create programs to attract the public. His first initiative was the Wednesday Evening Lectures. Every Wednesday the Gallery was open until nine o'clock with the presentation at eight. He and the staff alternated giving the talks, which followed a theme such as the history of furniture (1936) or French painting (1939). Average attendance for the 1936 series was 170, while Sickman's lectures on Oriental art in 1941 drew 211, which was the highest figure to date.² In the early years there were also visiting lecturers, such as Harold Woodbury Parsons who spoke twice in 1938 on new acquisitions during the fifth anniversary exhibition, and Aleksandr Archipenko who filled the auditorium with an address on modern sculpture. Another program to attract visitors was the Masterpiece of the Week, a work chosen from the permanent collection, which was installed in

Gallery XIV (now 116) with dramatic lighting, accompanied by an explanatory pamphlet, and publicized in the newspaper. Beginning in 1937 the staff took to the air waves with biweekly Sunday evening radio broadcasts on the lives of artists who were represented in the Gallery's collection.

While Gardner and his team were endeavoring to build adult audiences, an ambitious effort was launched to provide educational programs for children. The Trustees had agreed to establish an education department and to appoint a small staff. The first full-time director of education was Frances O'Donnell who came in August 1934 from the Buffalo Museum of Science. A native of Ellsworth, Kansas, and a graduate of Barnard College, O'Donnell in her five-year tenure put together the basic elements of the Gallery's education programs, which continue to this day. Acting upon the suggestion of Jane Hemingway Gordon, who was chairman of the arts committee of the Junior League of Kansas City, Missouri, she worked with Lillian Weil, supervisor of art education for the Kansas City, Missouri, public schools, to develop docent training courses for Junior League members, who then gave gallery tours to school children. The sixth grade was targeted as the most appropriate age group, and in short order O'Donnell produced four tours on painting, sculpture, glass and ceramics, and textiles for the city's sixth grade classes. Prior to coming to the Gallery

teachers received packets of material to prepare their classes for the visits. Reactions were highly favorable, and Mr. Melcher, superintendent of schools, wrote the Trustees "commending them for the very excellent results that were being attained. . . . All the teachers of the entire public school system were immensely pleased with Miss O'Donnell's assistance in the matter of art education."³ Starting in the fall of 1936, an American art tour based on the collections in the period rooms was written for seventh graders as a means of enriching their American history studies. Efforts to reach older students began in 1940 at Paseo High School, to which the Gallery sent monthly exhibits accompanied by explanatory pamphlets. The fame of the Nelson Gallery's programs in art education spread, and the format of docent-led tours for school children was widely copied. "Even the Metropolitan would model its program on Kansas City's."⁴

Another part of the junior education program was free Saturday morning classes for children, which were a hit from the first day and invariably had full enrollment. Saturday afternoon sections were added in 1936 to meet the demand. These programs incorporated gallery games and activities, such as Drawing for Fun and the Game Tray. Junior high school students were trained as junior docents who assisted with the gallery activities. In the summer of 1936 the Little Museum for Young Moderns was opened in Classroom A to display student work.

In 1939 Frances O'Donnell left to marry Henry Prior Clark, and she was succeeded by her assistant Louise Nelson, who then headed the department until she left for wartime service in December 1943. Both directors had able and versatile assistants, including Frances Webb, Barbara Barton, and Jane Rosenthal. Their success was

mirrored in the rising numbers of children who participated in the various programs: 37,534 in 1937; 43,406 in 1940; and 50,772 in 1942.

While children's classes and tours were attracting more participation each year, overall figures for visitors to the Gallery showed the opposite trend. The figure for 1934 was 328,791, which included an estimated 100,000 persons who came to the opening events in the last three weeks in December 1933. By mid 1935 attendance was heading down and the total for that year was 205,455. The low point for pre-war attendance was 1940 when only 142,119 visitors went through the turnstile. This trend clearly worried Gardner, who concluded his report to the Trustees for 1936 with the observation that "the Gallery is perhaps not making its full contribution to the community" and needs to work to remedy this decline. The director blamed the news media for not giving publicity to the Gallery's programs. Periods of extreme weather were also cited as causes. But the truth probably was that lectures and programs and presentation of the permanent collection in new formats could only attract an audience of 150,000 to 175,000 in an era before the 1960s when an explosion of interest in art and the advent of blockbuster exhibitions could be counted on to push up attendance.

An active exhibition program during the early years relied on using the permanent collection, and featured new acquisitions as well as loan shows. In 1935, for example, special exhibitions included paintings and drawings by Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, and Thomas Hart Benton; prints by Kaethe Kollwitz; and paintings by George Caleb Bingham. The next year contemporary Soviet painting and a van Gogh exhibition were on the schedule. The Gallery's fifth anniversary in 1938

was celebrated with an exhibition of art acquired since the opening. During this exhibition the one millionth visitor came to the Gallery. Original celluloid art by Walt Disney and a show of Nazi-banned contemporary German painting attracted crowds in 1939.

While special exhibitions were important, the strength of the Gallery remained the permanent collection. Throughout the 1930s there were acquisitions, but there was nothing like the orgy of buying in the years prior to the opening. In the matter of buying art the University Trustees continued to play a dominant role. J. C. Nichols put matters very clearly in making his report to the University Presidents at the end of 1934:

Mr. Nichols pointed out that the duties of the Trustees fall into three separate tasks: first, the handling of the Trust funds; second, the purchase of works of art; and third, the operation of the Gallery itself on an economical basis. It was explained that the Trustees did not wish to turn over the actual purchase of works of art to the staff; that while they depended upon them for recommendations of objects, the Trustees feel that large sums of money can be saved by handling the actual negotiations and this has been borne out by past experience. While many other art galleries leave these business matters to their staff, the Trustees are convinced that such a policy is not in the best interests of the Trust.⁵

Further, in relation to art acquisitions

Mr. Nichols explained to the University Presidents that the Trustees

had spent more than the accumulated income available for the purchase of works of art. There are two reasons for this action: first, it was necessary to make a creditable showing for the opening of the Gallery; and second, the market at the time was most favorable. For these reasons the Trustees thought it justifiable and good business to anticipate the income.⁶

Aside from the reduction of purchases because the Trustees had spent ahead, there were also gathering problems with the Trust's investments caused by the severe conditions of the Depression which brought the country to an economic standstill. Many of the Trust's holdings were in real estate mortgages. Conditions were such that a number of borrowers could not repay their loans; some could not pay interest or even meet tax payments on their properties. These financial constraints necessarily slowed the rate of art acquisitions.

Nevertheless, during these years all parts of the collection were strengthened with new material, none more so than the Asian collection. Langdon Warner continued to advise the Trustees from time to time, but it was really Laurence Sickman who guided these purchases. On Gardner's recommendation the Trustees sent Sickman twenty-five thousand dollars in February 1935, as it was an "opportunity for unusual purchases that the Trustees could not expect to have after Mr. Sickman is away from China and out of direct touch with the market."⁷ Sickman invested the money well. Shang bronzes, including the well-known *chia* or wine vessel (34-66), a *ku* or drinking vessel (34-244), a *li-ting* or cooking vessel (35-250), and a dagger axe with jade

blade (35-78), all added stature to the Gallery's holdings in early bronzes. Han pottery, Sung paintings, Shang dynasty jades, and a pair of chimera heads in limestone were some of the outstanding acquisitions. The Trustees had also bought from C.T. Loo a number of pieces which he had lent to



Water and Moon Kuan-yin Bodhisattva, 11th/12th century
Wood with paint; height: 95 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [34-10]

the opening, including the spectacular *Water and Moon Kuan-yin Bodhisattva* (34-10) in polychromed wood, which Sickman had earlier spotted in Peking, and the three-color lead glaze pottery *Luohan* (34-6).

Acquisitions of such distinction were bound to attract attention from other museums and collectors, and in May 1935 the Gallery was visited by George Eumorfopoulos of London, one of the world's leading collectors of Chinese art, who had given his collection to the British Museum. He and Sir Percival David and a committee of collectors and scholars were borrowing Chinese art for what was to

become the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, held at Burlington House, home of the Royal Academy of Arts, London, from November 1935 through March 1936.⁸ Eumorfopoulos was eager to borrow from Kansas City.

Sickman and Gardner are "very anxious to send some Chinese objects . . . to the British Loan Show to be held in Burlington House" which would mean prestige for the Nelson Gallery.⁹ "The British Committee had visited the Nelson Collection several months ago and had requested the loan of a large number of objects. As a matter of fact the Committee was so complimentary they said they would like to take practically the whole Chinese Collection to the exhibition." It was "thought unwise to allow so many things to be absent from the Gallery," and the final selection was limited to twenty-five.¹⁰

The Trustees gave permission for Sickman to go to London where he met all the leading figures in the world of Chinese art and basked in the reflected glory of the Nelson objects. In fact, the Nelson Gallery's twenty-five pieces made up the largest loan from an American museum and put Kansas City on the international map in the field of Chinese art. Six of the Nelson pieces were illustrated in the catalogue.¹¹ "The celebrated jade *pi* from Kansas City, . . . this lovely object of pale translucent honey-colour," was singled out for special praise.¹²

This recognition encouraged the Nelson Trustees to continue to collect Chinese art, even though the Japanese invasion of China effectively closed the market in Peking after 1937. As late as 1940 there were notable additions to the collection, with Gardner reporting that "Dr. Otto Burchard was able to acquire and to deliver to us at an extremely small price a number of exceptionally fine pieces of Buddhist sculpture."¹³ That same year the Trustees purchased a pair of blue and white Ming vases from

the reign of the Hsüan-te Emperor (40-45/1,2), and C.T. Loo sent a collection of bronzes for consideration. All of these acquisitions meant that additional exhibition space was needed, and the Trustees decided to create two new galleries for Chinese art as part of a general expansion into the west wing.

One of the new Chinese galleries was for sculpture and it had as its centerpiece the famous frieze from Lung-men, *The Empress as Donor with Attendants* (40-38). The frieze had been carved in the living rock of a Buddhist cave temple in Honan province. Sickman first visited the cave complex, one of the national treasures of China, in 1931 and had rubbings made of the principal groupings of

Edward Forbes, director of the Fogg Art Museum, and Sickman of the Nelson Gallery jointly bought for their two institutions all the fragments that could be found and sent them to Kansas City. Sickman laid them out in a sand box and, working from rubbings and photographs, assembled the main elements of the Empress frieze. The Fogg Museum relinquished its share in the frieze, which was then erected in the Nelson's new Chinese sculpture gallery in the spring of 1941. Though Sickman is often blamed by the Chinese for taking the frieze to America, a more detached view might be inclined to praise him for preserving the sculpture from being dispersed and lost forever.¹⁵

The two new galleries for Chinese sculpture and paintings allowed the older Chinese galleries to be reinstalled with more pieces from the collection than had been shown previously. At this date also there came from one Fanny Pomoroy Brown the gift of a collection of cricket cages, which has delighted school children and adults alike now for more than fifty years. By 1941 the Nelson Gallery's holdings of Chinese art placed it in the top rank of American museums in the Asian field.

By this date also a respectable collection of Indian and southeast Asian sculpture had entered the collection and was displayed in the Indian Temple Room created from architectural elements — a coffered ceiling, a sculptural frieze, and two doorways — from an assembly hall in south India. Among the objects shown there were an important Gandaran *Head of a Buddha* (33-350) and the bronze figure of Karaikkalammaiya (33-533). Eight south Indian sculptures were purchased from C.T. Loo in 1934, and Sickman acquired nine objects from north India in 1935, thus effectively balancing the collection. A small collection of Persian art also gave representation to that culture.



Empress as Donor with Attendants, c. A.D. 505/23

Limestone with traces of color; 76 x 109 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [40-38]

sculpture. On a later trip in 1933 it was clear that grave robbers had hacked out heads and figures from the reliefs. Indeed, many fragments had already appeared on the Peking art market. "The story of the desecration of Lung-men is a tale with many villains. The figure who comes closest to being a hero is Laurence Sickman."¹⁴ Sickman concluded that the best course to preserve the frieze was to try to acquire the pieces and fit them back together.



Lorenzo di Credi
Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist, c. 1510
 Oil and tempera on wood panel; 40 1/16 x 28 5/8 inches; purchase: Nelson
 Trust [39-3]

Despite the Nelson Gallery's emphasis on Asian art, the European and American art collections were not neglected. Harold Woodbury Parsons continued to advise the Trustees in these areas, and he helped them make significant acquisitions. Early Italian paintings — Don Lorenzo Monaco and workshop, *Virgin and Child* (40-40), and Bernardo Daddi, *Saint John the Evangelist* (39-14) — filled gaps in this area, and an early sixteenth-century work, Lorenzo di Credi, *Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* (39-3), was also acquired. In the Flemish area a typical panel by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, *Summer Harvest* (34-297), joined the collection.

With Parsons' guidance a number of pieces of sculpture were also acquired. By far the most spec-

tacular purchase was a pair of lovers by Francesco Mosca, *Atalanta and Meleager with the Calydonian Boar* (34-94). Mosca was a follower of Michelangelo, and his famous work was cut from a single block of marble. Perhaps mindful of Arthur Hyde's dislike of nudes and the Gallery's family audience, a reporter wrote that Mosca depicted "an intimate love scene" which was "planned and executed by the artist with chaste restraint. The group is pervaded by an abstract quality of unreality."¹⁶ No description could be further from the truth. Mosca's lovers have distracted sixth grade tours and rattled docents since the day they appeared in Kirkwood Hall. The sculpture is also one of the best documented works in the collection: its whereabouts are known from the moment the artist put down his tools until this masterpiece entered the west door of the Nelson Gallery. One of its prior owners was the eccentric collector Edward Perry Warren.¹⁷



Francesco Mosca, called Moschino
Atalanta and Meleager with the Calydonian Boar, 1564/65
 Marble; height: 81 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [34-94]

French nineteenth-century paintings, including a number of Impressionist works, were also acquired in this period. These purchases included Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Lise Campineanu* (36-5), and Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Gysbertus de Groot* (37-1). Gardner urged the Trustees to buy a Cézanne after the thirty-year rule in Nelson's will ceased to apply (Cézanne died in 1906), and in 1938 *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (38-6) entered the collection. The same year the Trustees bought Paul Gauguin, *Faaturuma (Melancholic)* (38-5), a Tahitian picture of



Paul Gauguin
Faaturuma (Melancholic), 1891
Oil on canvas; 37 x 26 3/4 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [38-5]

1891. Gardner urged the Trustees to purchase van Gogh, *Postman*, which had been one of the most popular paintings in the van Gogh exhibition in 1936; evidently the Trustees felt they had overspent, as there is no further mention of this picture.¹⁸

The first major gift to the Gallery after the

initial bequests came from Frank P. and Harriet Call Burnap, who since the 1920s had been quietly acquiring outstanding examples of English pottery. They bought slipware, Whieldon, Wedgwood, and



Frank P. Burnap at home, 3601 Baltimore Street, Kansas City.

other ceramics, and at the time of the opening they had loaned examples from their collection to the Gallery. They continued to add fine examples during the 1930s and 1940s, and Mr. Burnap was still acquiring delftware at the time of his death at the age of ninety-six in 1957. The entire Burnap collection was formally presented to the Gallery and installed in the new west wing in 1941.¹⁹

A number of American pictures were bought or received as gifts. One of the most famous canvases, Raphaëlle Peale, *Venus Rising from the Sea - A Deception* (34-137), formerly known as *After the Bath*, was acquired in 1934. In the same year the Gallery also bought a double portrait of Mr. and Mrs. John Custance (34-77) by Benjamin West. At about this time the Board of Education, Kansas City, Missouri, which owned the pair of portraits of Dr. and Mrs. Benoist Troost (34-42/1-2) by George Caleb Bingham, transferred them to the Gallery.



Attributed to Samuel Malkin

Adam and Eve Charger, c. 1725

Slipware; diameter: 17 3/4 inches; gift of Frank P. and Harriet C. Burnap [56-107]

Perhaps a missed opportunity was the failure of the Trustees to buy Bingham's *Order No. 11* from the James Rollins family, who offered it at the price of ten thousand dollars, and that historic canvas eventually found a permanent home in the State Historical Society in Columbia, Missouri.

Sculpture from the ancient world was bought throughout the decade and was originally displayed in the Rotunda. In April 1941, the beautifully proportioned Classical Hall, panelled in a richly veined black marble, was opened to display the small but representative collections of Near Eastern, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art. This new gallery was created in the previously unfinished west wing, along with a pair of galleries for the Burnap Collection and for European sculpture.²⁰ In anticipation of further expansion the Trustees acquired in 1941 and 1942 several period rooms, including a Venetian alcove, paneling for an Elizabethan room, and a Louis XIII gold-panelled drawing room. These period rooms were not installed until after World War II.

The only area omitted from all these collecting activities was modern art, and here the Trustees were stymied by the thirty-year rule in Nelson's will. Though Paul Gardner's interests were not particularly in the field of contemporary art, both he and the Trustees recognized the desirability of collecting works of their own time. This need was emphasized by the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929 and by the activities of other leading American museums in buying modern art. Monet had been dead only seven years in 1933, Picasso, Matisse, and other modern masters were at the height of their careers, but their works seemed destined never to enter the Nelson Gallery. It was to overcome this handicap that the Friends of Art was founded.



Kirkwood Hall, 1941.

The first mention of the group appears in the minutes of the Trustees' meeting on December 10, 1934: "Mr. Nichols reported several conferences with Mrs. Logan Clendenning in reference to the formation of an organization known as 'Friends of Art'. . . . The purpose of the 'Friends of Art' will be to

purchase works of contemporary art to be presented to the Nelson Trustees or Atkins Trustees for exhibition at the Gallery. The group to pass on the objects to be acquired will be Mr. Rossiter Howard [President of the Kansas City Art Institute], Mr. Fred C. Vincent and Mr. Paul Gardner."

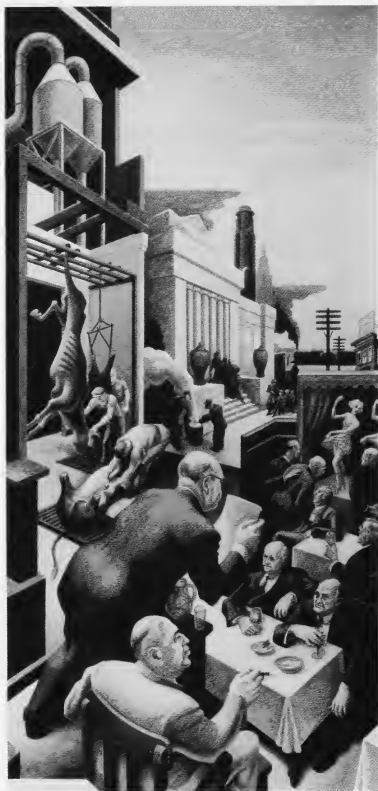
Acquiring contemporary art for the Gallery would also serve the needs of students at the Art Institute, in whose affairs J.C. Nichols was keenly interested. A group of civic leaders and society ladies, described by Nicholas S. Pickard as "the art crowd," had long been supporters of the Art Institute. Pickard, the genial historian of the Friends of Art, suggests that Nichols and Gardner may have encouraged "the art crowd" to get behind the new Friends organization.²¹ "A small temporary committee," chaired by Mrs. Clendenning, "already has obtained several hundred dollars and the first contemporary work of art now is being considered."²² In addition to Mrs. Clendenning, the advance committee included Mrs. David T. Beals, Mrs. Peter T. Bohan, Mrs. Frederick H. Harvey, Mrs. D.L. James, Mrs. Edward Keith, Mrs. James M. Kemper, Mrs. Gerald Parker, Mrs. Edwin W. Shields, Mrs. Leroy J. Snyder, Mrs. Fred Cameron Vincent, and Mrs. James Mayne White.

Whether prompted by Nichols and Gardner or not, "there can be no question that Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Clendenning were the real founders of the Friends of Art." Both were "outstanding women: Mrs. Parker moved things and she inspired Mrs. Clendenning who must have been a real ball of fire — large, handsome, and smart enough to say at the opening meeting: 'Such a philanthropic effort would stimulate an interest in art in Kansas City not only in lay groups but hopefully in the students of the Art Institute [who], while they greatly admire

the achievements of the old masters, [must find] their main interest and stimulus in what they are doing as developing artists in seeing what their contemporaries are doing.'"²³

The Friends of Art was separately incorporated and came into existence in December 1934, exactly one year after the Gallery was opened. At its organizational meeting Fred C. Vincent was elected president; Mrs. Logan Clendenning, first vice-president; Mrs. David M. Lighton, second vice-president; Mrs. Frank I. Ridge, secretary; and Mrs. Morton T. Jones, treasurer. At an early meeting to consider what art to purchase the Friends were offered John Steuart Curry, *Tornado*, and paintings by André Dunoyer de Segonzac and Henry Varnum Poor. The group voted to defer action as a means of "increasing our standing as a bargaining purchaser by selecting nothing from the first group of pictures offered."²⁴ Later that year the Friends did buy Poor's *Dead Pheasants* (35-336), perhaps not a glorious choice but at least a commitment to the acquisition of contemporary art. Over the next decade under the leadership of succeeding presidents, D.L. James, Robert Fizzell, Blatchford Downing, Walter Jaccard, and B.N. Simpson, the Friends of Art bought mainly American paintings by such artists as Benton, Kuhn, Marsh, and Burchfield. The role of the Friends as a support group was recognized further in 1937 when its members were granted the privilege of free admission (then twenty-five cents) to the Gallery. By that date there were 201 members paying dues of ten dollars a year.

Fostering the growth of the Friends of Art was only one of the activities of the University Trustees, who in almost every area assumed the responsibility of administering the Gallery. Gardner was the director, to be sure, but in many ways he



Thomas Hart Benton, *A Social History of Missouri*, detail, 1936; background, three swells in evening dress rush up the steps of the Nelson Gallery; foreground, Boss Tom Pendergast with cigar shares a table with J.C. Nichols and W.T. Kemper, as they listen to a speech by Bryson Jones (courtesy of Missouri State Museum).

functioned more as a chief curator or administrative assistant. The Trustees held their meetings in the office of the Trust, and often their attorneys, John E. Wilson or Henry Bundschu, met with them, but Gardner was seldom present. For example, in 1934 they held fourteen meetings, but Gardner attended

only two. This pattern apparently did not change, as Gardner's recommendations in 1941 included the request for a monthly meeting with the Trustees. They also set the budget, approved appointments to the staff, granted salary increases, and made decisions about the building. Fiscal austerity, always prudent and especially so in the Depression years of the 1930s, meant that staff members had low salaries and carried multiple responsibilities. Gardner remonstrated in 1935, pointing out that the Nelson Gallery had a budget of only \$80,000, while the budget of the Cleveland Museum, which then occupied a smaller building, was \$268,000. At this period the William Rockhill Nelson Trust had an income of about \$450,000 per year. There can be no doubt that Nichols and Jones were very resourceful in their management of the Trust and energetic in their direction of the Gallery and that they had a deep interest in everything that concerned the institution's welfare. From the summer of 1935, when Arthur M. Hyde resigned, until 1940, when Robert B. Caldwell was appointed as the third Trustee, Nichols and Jones acted alone.

A challenge to the Gallery from an unexpected quarter came in 1936 when fifteen collateral descendants of Mary Atkins filed a suit against David Childs and Herbert V. Jones, trustees of the Atkins estate, seeking restitution of the sum of \$675,000, the amount of money which the Atkins trustees had pooled with Nelson funds to construct the building. The grounds of the suit were murky. The main complaint seems to have been the comingling of Atkins with Nelson money and its shared use in erecting a building in both their names.²⁵ The demurrer by Childs and Jones was prompt and vigorous. The heirs' attempt was unsuccessful and the suit was dismissed in January 1937. By a fortu-

nate coincidence the University Trustees had authorized W. Wallace Rosenbauer, chairman of the sculpture department at the Art Institute, to create a marble plaque in honor of the centenary of Mary Atkins' birth.²⁶ This memorial was placed on the landing of the stairway in the Atkins Museum and was unveiled in October 1936 with much publicity. Coming as it did in the midst of the suit, the plaque tended to bolster the point that Atkins' contribution was well recognized and that the partnership with the Nelson heirs carried out her intention to create a museum of fine arts in Kansas City.



Mary Atkins, roundel by W. Wallace Rosenbauer, placed on the wall of Atkins Stairway on the centennial of her birth, 1936.

In one area the Trustees were at first notably unsuccessful, and that was in their relations with city officials. The city of Kansas City, Missouri was given the twenty-acre Oak Hall estate by Irwin Kirkwood in 1927, with the understanding that it was to be the site of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery. The University Trustees had held many conferences with the mayor, Bryce B. Smith, and the city manager, H.F. McElroy, and "at no time had either one of them indicated that the city would not at least take care of the buildings and grounds."

Both officials had been kept informed of the progress of construction and later of the expenses of operating the building. Nichols requested fifty thousand dollars a year to operate the building; the mayor demurred at this sum but "thought they might allow \$25,000." At a conference on October 8, 1934, "the city manager very flatly said that the city had no funds whatever available and could not make any allowance for this year." The city had cut salaries of city employees, and the city manager stated "he much preferred to keep hospitals open than the gallery." The conference became "very heated" and "lasted two hours with the above results."²⁷ The Trustees were obliged to pay for maintenance of the building from Trust income until the city could be induced to pay its share. At last in 1936, with an improvement in its finances and in response to continuing pressure by Nichols, the city began to pay some of the costs of keeping up the building and grounds. Clearly the hybrid structure of the Gallery — an art collection controlled by trustees in a building owned by a municipality — has made for a good deal of give and take about its finances over the years.

In the period between the Gallery's opening in December 1933 and American entry into World War II eight years later in December 1941, the Gallery established its programs and expanded its collections in a very impressive manner, under the leadership of J.C. Nichols and Herbert V. Jones, and of Paul Gardner and his talented staff. The conditions of World War II created a hiatus in its development, and the momentum for further growth and change was not resumed until new leaders came on the scene in the early postwar years.

¹ Wolfman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 96.

² Reports to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1936 and 1941, NAMA Archives.

³ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, December 10, 1934, NAMA Archives.

⁴ "Children's Course in Art," no date, NAMA Archives, quoted in Wolfman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins."

⁵ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, December 15, 1934, NAMA Archives.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, January 14, 1935, NAMA Archives.

⁸ The Chinese government lent many of the most spectacular pieces in the former Imperial collections. They were conveyed from Shanghai to England by a cruiser of the Royal Navy. Patrons of the Exhibition were the president of China and King George V and Queen Mary. The Crown Prince of Sweden (later King Gustav VI Adolf) was also a large lender.

⁹ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, July 2, 1935, NAMA Archives.

¹⁰ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, August 30, 1935, NAMA Archives.

¹¹ Plate 3, bronze *chia* (34-66); Plate 18, bronze axe (35-77); Plate 44, jade *pi* (33-81); Plate 47, jade pendant (35-88); Plate 81, scroll painting attributed to Hsia Kuei (32-159/2); and Plate 103, covered jar (34-254). *The Chinese Exhibition: A Commemorative Catalogue of the International Exhibition of Chinese Art, Royal Academy of Arts, November, 1935-March, 1936*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1935).

¹² Leigh Ashton, "The Lacquer and Jade," *The Burlington Magazine*, January 1936, p. 45. See also *Kansas City Star*, January 30, 1936.

¹³ Director's Annual Report, 1940, NAMA Archives.

¹⁴ Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 111.

¹⁵ The best sources on *The Empress as Donor with Attendants* are the following: 1) correspondence among Edward Forbes, Paul J. Sachs, Langdon Warner, Paul Gardner, and Laurence Sickman between 1934 and 1940, Harvard University Museums archives; summarized by Robert D. Mowry, associate curator of Oriental art, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, in a letter dated August 1, 1988, to Nicholas S. Pickard; NAMA Archives; 2) Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art*; 3) article by Laurence Sickman, *Kansas City Star*, January 29, 1967; 4) Churchman, *Sickman*, pp. 35-37; and 5) Churchman interview with Sickman, January 21, 1983. The companion frieze of the Emperor is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

¹⁶ *Kansas City Journal-Post*, September 16, 1934.

¹⁷ Warren was a Bostonian who settled at Lewes House in Sussex and assembled a famous collection of sculpture in the era before World War I. Many works from his collection are now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. See Sox, *Bachelors of Art*.

¹⁸ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, April 29, 1935, NAMA Archives.

¹⁹ Ross E. Taggart, *The Frank P. and Harriet C. Burnap Collection of English Pottery in the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery*, revised and enlarged edition (Kansas City: Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, 1967), pp. 5-12.

²⁰ The trustees of the Laura Nelson Kirkwood Residuary Trust, anticipating the need to install galleries in the west wing, had reserved funds for this purpose.

²¹ Nicholas S. Pickard, "Friends of Art," pp. A2-A5.

²² *Kansas City Star*, December 5, 1934.

²³ Pickard, "Friends of Art," p. A9.

²⁴ *Kansas City Star*, January 11, 1935.

²⁵ *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1935.

²⁶ That same year Rosenbauer also created plaques in honor of Ida Houston Nelson and Irwin and Laura Kirkwood, which are placed on either side of the north entrance to Kirkwood Hall. Rosenbauer was also very helpful to Sickman in the work of reassembling the Lung-men *Empress* frieze.

²⁷ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, October 8, 1934, NAMA Archives.



Captain Laurence Sickman, 1943.

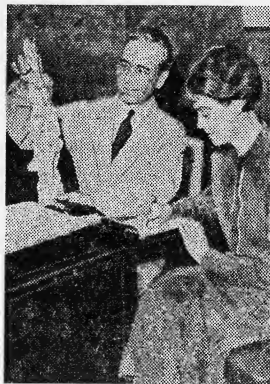
VI

W A R T I M E A N D B E Y O N D

It was not long after Pearl Harbor before wartime conditions affected the leadership of the Nelson Gallery. Paul Gardner, who was mustered out of the United States Army in World War I as a much-decorated captain, was soon commissioned a major in the U.S. Army in World War II. He recommended to the Trustees that they appoint Ethlyne Jackson as acting director, with which they readily concurred. Jackson had become the director's secretary in August 1933, but over the years she had assumed many additional roles, acting as Gardner's executive assistant and serving as curator of the American period rooms and decorative arts. Her undergraduate major had been in art history, and she had recently returned in June 1942 from a year of graduate study at Yale. Ethlyne Jackson took up her new responsibilities after Gardner left in November 1942 for duty overseas, which took him first to North Africa and then to Italy.

Jackson was not simply a caretaker, but adapted the Gallery's programs to wartime conditions and made them successful. She organized a quiet celebration of the tenth anniversary, highlighting the decade's acquisitions.¹ Her annual reports to the Trustees make lively and informative reading and offered sound suggestions. She turned over the administration to Gardner on his return at the end of 1945.²

Sickman also left for the Army. With his knowledge of China, he was clearly in a position to contribute to the war in the Far East. Commissioned a first lieutenant in the United States Army



Ethlyne Jackson, taking dictation from Paul Gardner, about 1940.

Intelligence Corps, he went for training in Miami in May 1942 and was later assigned to London and India, and then sent to China. Like Gardner he also left behind a capable assistant, Lindsay Hughes, and he recommended to the Trustees that she be appointed acting curator of Oriental art. Hughes had joined the staff in September 1933 and proved to be an exceptionally capable hand. "In addition to

duties as Mr. Sickman's assistant, is in charge of the Library, radio programs, handles monthly magazine publicity, and gives lectures," so runs her job description in 1939. Like Jackson she also took graduate courses, first at Princeton and later at the University of Chicago.

Other key Gallery staff soon left for wartime jobs. James Roth, who had begun life at the Gallery as a part-time guard while he was a student at the Art Institute, had become indispensable as conservator of paintings. He left the conservation studio in March 1943 for war production work at the Pratt and Whitney aircraft plant. Clarence Simpson, who became superintendent on January 1, 1943, found that his crew of young maintenance workers had all been drafted into military service. He was obliged to hire older, retired men to replace them. A similar change took place in the guard force. Women also responded to the patriotic call of wartime service. Both full-time staff members of the Education Department left the Gallery, Frances Webb joining the overseas service of the Red Cross in July 1943 and Louise Nelson following her into the Red Cross in December. They were succeeded by Mary Louise Clifton, "an art teacher from Springfield [who] came as a volunteer in the Oriental Department and stayed three years as head of the Education Department."³ Of course retrenchment in personnel meant that the Gallery could reduce its budget for operations, which was only \$65,245 in 1943.

All the wartime staff members were determined to carry on much as usual and to keep the Gallery and its programs available to the public. Sixth grade tours were cut from four to two a year. Wednesday Evening Lectures continued, and musi-

cal programs and films were added. Still, attendance went down when so many were in the services and when time and leisure — and rationed gasoline and tires — were scarce. Attendance was 120,184 in 1942, 112,235 in 1943, 120,491 in 1944, and 129,350 the last year of the war. The staff and the Trustees made the building available for various wartime activities, such as training classes for Red Cross and civil defense workers which were held in Atkins Auditorium.

The most popular place in the Gallery during World War II was the north mezzanine, which was turned into a service lounge in October 1942. It was staffed by volunteers who offered simple refreshments and entertainment. Members of the Art Study Club furnished cookies, an assignment that was later taken over by the ladies of the Hyde Park Christian Church. Dances were held in Kirkwood Hall, with soldiers, sailors, and their girls jitterbugging around the stately columns.

Another feature of wartime life at the Gallery was the presence of several famous collections of art whose owners lived on the East Coast and were afraid that their treasures might be destroyed in bombing raids. At the end of 1941 Robert Lehman sent twelve Old Master Italian paintings from New York for safekeeping. Forty French pictures from Duncan Phillips' collection in Washington soon followed, including Renoir, *The Luncheon of the Boating Party*. The Robert Woods Bliss of Dumbarton Oaks sent tapestries and rugs, and paintings from the Lewisohn and Levinson collections also found refuge in Kansas City. Fortunately for the community the Gallery was permitted to put many of these collections on display for the public's enjoyment.

While such exiled collections added new works for visitors to see, the pace of acquisition for the permanent collection slowed during the war and only picked up again after 1945. World War II was not a propitious time to buy European art, with the continent fully occupied by Hitler's armies and later with fighting on three fronts. The Gallery's European advisor, Harold Parsons, had been obliged to leave his base in Rome but continued to give counsel to the Trustees from New York. After Germany's surrender the market in Europe slowly revived, and in the postwar world New York moved into the forefront of the art trade. At this same time the Trustees were cautious about buying art because they were husbanding funds for the eventual installation of the period rooms, which they had acquired just before the war. Despite these limitations, there were a number of additions to the collection in the decade between 1942 and 1952.

A generous gift came to the Nelson Gallery at the end of 1944 from Robert Lehman. In appreciation for the Gallery's role in giving a home to his paintings during wartime he presented the Trustees with the well-known canvas by John Hoppner known as *The Tambourine Girl*, but now retitled *Portrait of Emily St. Clare as a Bacchante* (45-1). Lehman had recently bought Hoppner's painting at a bargain price from the Philadelphia collector Edward T. Stotesbury. Emily St. Clare was the mistress of Hoppner's patron Sir John Leicester. Her portrait certainly adds spice to the bland staple of the Gallery's other English pictures, though the dancer's charms seem somewhat lost in the cool twilight of the English period room.⁴

Another wartime acquisition, Hans Memling, *Virgin and Child Enthroned* (44-43), added

weight to the Gallery's Flemish pictures. This purchase won the approval of Bernard Berenson. Gardner had lunch with him at 1 Tatti shortly after the liberation of Florence and wrote that his host "was interested in the new things, [and was] especially complimentary about the Lorenzo Monaco and the Memling, which he knew well."⁵ That next year



John Hoppner
Portrait of Emily St. Clare as a Bacchante, 1806-7
Oil on canvas; 94 1/2 x 59 inches; gift of Mr. Robert Lehman [45-1]

the Trustees and Parsons made another attempt to acquire a Velázquez, buying a portrait of Mariana, Queen of Spain (45-36), which is now considered to be the work of Juan Bautista del Mazo. Later purchases turned out to be more fortunate, including the exceptionally elegant Bronzino, *Portrait of a*

Young Man (49-28) and El Greco, *Portrait of a Trinitarian Monk* (52-23). Other acquisitions included works by Mabuse, Strozzi, Van Dyck, and Crespi.

By far the most significant acquisition of the postwar era was Caravaggio, *Saint John the Baptist* (52-25), now considered one of the Nelson Gallery's finest Old Master paintings.⁶ During a trip to



Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio
Saint John the Baptist, c. 1604/5

Oil on canvas; 68 x 52 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [52-25]

London in the spring of 1952 Milton McGreevy and his wife, Barbara, and daughter Jean were walking up Old Bond Street and went into the gallery of the dealer Sir Geoffrey Agnew.⁷ There they were shown the Caravaggio, which the National Gallery, Washington, had been considering. McGreevy immediately put a reserve on it for Kansas City.⁸ It is now the centerpiece of the Nelson Gallery's growing collection of Italian Baroque paintings. It is interest-

ing to note that the Trustees, after much bargaining, paid only sixty-seven thousand dollars for the Caravaggio, while the El Greco and the now spurious Velázquez cost more than twice that amount. *Saint John the Baptist* is one of only seven pictures by Caravaggio in the United States, and John Walker, then director of the National Gallery, greatly regretted not buying it.⁹ Shortly after this purchase the Nelson Gallery's collection of Italian art was further enriched by the loan of twenty-two paintings and four sculptures from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

In addition to European painting, the Trustees and Gardner bought widely in other fields as well. Egyptian reliefs from the tomb of Methethy at Saqqara (52-7 /1,2) and the polychromed wooden figure of Methethy (51-1), a red-figured Attic kylix (51-58), the purported head of Hammurabi (49-15), and a bull capital from Persepolis (50-14) were some of the notable acquisitions in the field of Ancient art. Important gifts of American painting came from Mrs. Ferdinand Heim who presented William Keith, *Sunset Glow* (45-22), while Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha gave Childe Hassam, *The Sonata* (52-5). The bequest of Frances M. Logan, who was one of Kansas City's most dedicated collectors, brought to the Gallery in 1946 her wide-ranging collection of modern European and American paintings and prints. Prints and photographs were received also from the estate of Thomas Handforth. Mr. and Mrs. Milton McGreevy created the Westport Fund in 1942 for the purpose of buying contemporary art for the Gallery. Also in the field of contemporary art the Friends of Art shifted its emphasis to European artists after the war and presented works by de Chirico, Rouault, and Utrillo, among others.

In the Asian field the war created exceptional opportunities, none more dramatic than

Sickman's descent on Peking two days after the Japanese surrender. After service in London, Sickman had been attached to Lord Mountbatten's staff in New Delhi and then to General Claire Chennault's command in Chungking. "Not surprisingly, the Nelson Gallery acquired a few items from London and New Delhi — and the Indian collection received more attention than it had previously."¹⁰ At the end of the war he made the memorable flight to Peking with his colonel where they received the surrender of the Japanese forces. "He found old friends there, including [Otto] Burchard, who had taken refuge in the Soviet Embassy. Burchard had maintained contacts with Chinese dealers throughout the war and had a marble lion Sickman agreed to buy if Burchard could deliver it — which he did. Sickman was also able to buy some good pieces from local dealers for Guomindang script."¹¹ On the flight back to Chungking the "bomb bay [was] packed with surrendered *samurai* swords and masterpieces by Shen Chou, Wen Cheng-ming, and Lu Chih, the nucleus of the Nelson Gallery's collection of Ming painting, all purchased with funds hurriedly and irregularly borrowed from a suitcase containing \$250,000 belonging to the Quartermaster Corps."¹² Cohen concludes this episode with the observation: "Where the power of America reached (and often beyond), the museum curator, like the missionary and businessman before him, took advantage of opportunity."¹³

While Sickman was away Lindsay Hughes had bought from C. T. Loo the pair of limestone *Chimera* (44-26/1,2), which had long been under consideration and which now flank the entrance to the Chinese Temple. On his return Sickman persuaded the Trustees to take advantage of the availability of

good Chinese paintings at reasonable prices, and they evidently responded. "In all five Chinese paintings were acquired, all of which are of a quality calculated to make the Gallery collection of Chinese paintings one of the three or four leading collections in America."¹⁴ This group included Li K'an, *Ink Bamboo* (48-16). The same year the purchase of a set of four T'ang dynasty tomb figures of lady polo players (48-31/1-4) was generously funded by Katherine Harvey. Three more Chinese paintings were added in 1950, including *The Sixteen Luohan* (50-11). That same year C.T. Loo, the Duveen of Oriental art dealers, as Sickman called him, decided to liquidate his firm and sent a number of objects to the Nelson Gallery on approval, many of which the Trustees eventually acquired. After a visit to Kansas City Sir Osbert Sitwell wrote that the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery has a "collection of Chinese art unrivaled elsewhere in the continent except in Toronto and the Metropolitan in New York." He added that the Gallery stands "as a living assertion of the value of the arts, and lacks the petrified quality sometimes to be sensed in European galleries."¹⁵

Throughout the post-war years there were also purchases of Indian and southeast Asian sculpture, with C.T. Loo as the most significant source. Between 1941 and 1951 thirteen sculptures were acquired from Loo, and the list reads like a roll call of the collection's treasures: a bronze Tree of Life (41-35), a Yogini from Kanchipuram (45-15), three friezes from Cambodia (48-18, 49-20,21), a late Gupta base for a Surya image (48-19), a Jain sculpture of a Naga king (51-26), a male head from Mathura of the Krushna period (51-32), and four bronzes from South India. After Lindsay Hughes' departure in 1946, Sickman took charge of south-



Paul Gardner, surrounded by recent acquisitions, Life, July 31, 1950.

east Asian material, with assistance from Jeanne Harris, associate curator.

While art acquisitions occupied much of the Trustees' time, their attention was focused also on further expansion into the west wing. The war had interrupted their plans for completing period rooms and galleries on the first floor. Gardner had hoped that the new spaces would be completed in time for the fifteenth anniversary in December 1948; but like all building projects, work fell behind and the celebration had to be postponed until April 3, 1949. Reminiscent of the opening in 1933, dealers and curators came from around the country, along with five thousand other visitors who were eager to see the new installations.

A thirteenth-century cloister, from near Beauvais, was re-erected on the Museum's main axis west of Rozelle Court. It had been bought by an agent for William Randolph Hearst, who had intended to install it at San Simeon but later sold it to the Nelson Trustees. The north side of the cloister led to a Spanish chapel, an Elizabethan room, and a small gallery for Egyptian, Etruscan, and Coptic art, the latter sheathed in black marble to match the adjoining Classical Hall. On the south side of the cloister were galleries for medieval sculpture and decorative arts, a Louis XIII panelled drawing room with classical motifs painted on a gold ground, and an eighteenth-century Venetian alcove. These installations filled the first floor of the west wing. For the fifteenth anniversary the center loan gallery had an exhibition of the best European works acquired each year since the opening, and a similar display of Asian art was arranged in the south loan gallery.¹⁶ As a way of celebrating the fifteenth anniversary and describing the new installations in

the west wing, the Gallery published in 1949 the third edition of the *Handbook* to the collections.

The fifteenth anniversary marked a kind of dissolution of the leadership which had brought the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum into being and nurtured its growth. The noble band of original trustees and staff was now passing from the scene. Herbert V. Jones was the first to go, dying on August 27, 1949, aged seventy.¹⁷ His trusteeship of both the Atkins and Nelson estates and his keen involvement with the building of the Museum and every phase of its subsequent development were significant and lasting contributions. J.C. Nichols did not long survive him, dying February 15, 1950, aged sixty-nine.¹⁸ "That great and enigmatic man," as Nicholas Pickard described him, had a vision of the important role which the Gallery could play in the southwestern region, and had applied his great energies to purchasing art and at the same time conserving the corpus of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust. One editorial writer described him as a "dollar-conscious, creative genius." Jones and Nichols, both experts in real estate, were ideally suited to give the Nelson Trust the best possible financial management. Jones was succeeded by Milton McGreevy and Nichols by David T. Beals Jr., who, together with Robert Caldwell, formed the new team of Trustees.

Not long afterwards Paul Gardner retired as director on May 1, 1953. Gardner's contribution is sometimes overlooked, but it was he who assembled and installed the collection, making sense of the mass purchases of art and presenting the works effectively in the new galleries. His commitments to education and to community service set patterns that all his successors have emulated. Gardner went to live in his house, Las Milpas, near Lincoln, New Mexico,

spending his years of retirement in study and travel. He died at his home on September 11, 1972, aged seventy-seven.

The postwar years were indeed a period of transition, with the original leaders relinquishing their roles and making way for a new generation. The year 1953 inaugurated the long and effective directorship of Laurence Sickman. He had an impressive new team of trustees of stature and he recruited a talented staff. Their combined energy and commitment carried the Gallery to the next plateau of its development in the 1950s and 1960s.

¹ Ethlyne Jackson, "Museum Record: Kansas City's Tenth Birthday," *Art News*, December 15, 1943, pp. 13-18, 39.

² "When the war was over, it could have been a sticky situation. Ethlyne and I were used to shouldering responsibilities, making decisions and acting accordingly. Now we were giving the Gallery back to the men. At this time I think we showed great intelligence. Mr. Gardner returned and Ethlyne married Germain Seligman; Mr. Sickman returned and I married Frank Cooper, and we both went to live in New York." Cooper, "Remembrances," p. 12. Frank and Lindsay Cooper moved back to Kansas City in 1970. Ethlyne Jackson Seligman died May 12, 1993, aged eighty-six, in New York.

³ "Remembrances," p. 10.

⁴ *Art News*, August 1945, p. 21; John Wilson, "Hoppner's 'tambourine girl' identified," *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 130 (October 1988), pp. 763-766.

⁵ Paul Gardner to the Nelson Gallery staff, no date [October 1944 ?], NAMA Archives. Gardner was

later posted from Florence to Naples, where he remained until November 1945. He played a key role in the American army's effort to return Italian art stolen by the Germans to its rightful owners.

⁶ Eliot W. Rowlands, *European Paintings in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*. vol. I, *Italian School* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

⁷ Milton McGreevy had been appointed a University Trustee in November 1949, succeeding Herbert V. Jones. See below.

⁸ Interview by Michael Churchman with Barbara James McGreevy, November 8, 1990.

⁹ John Walker, in writing about his wife and her remarkable powers in spotting good pictures, said that he "often used her eye to check my judgments. I wish I had always followed her advice. The most important picture I did not acquire when I might have, a St. John the Baptist by Caravaggio, now in Kansas City, I lost when I ignored her recommendation. . . . I made a mistake which still haunts me." John Walker, *Self-Portrait with Donors* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), pp. 33-34.

¹⁰ Cohen, *East Asian Art*, p. 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Marc F. Wilson, "Laurence Sickman," an address given at the Century Association, May 19, 1977, to honor Laurence Sickman on the occasion of his receiving the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters *Honoris Causa* from Columbia University. Quoted in Churchman, *Sickman*, pp. 16-21.

¹³ Cohen, *East Asian Art*, p. 131.

¹⁴ Annual Report to the Trustees for 1948, NAMA Archives.

¹⁵ Sir Osbert Sitwell, "Cities of America," *The Sunday Times*, June 12, 1949. He wrote that Kansas City only a few generations ago "was inhabited solely by Redskins, leading their nomadic lives, fishing and hunting. My hostess at dinner the second night of my visit was the great-niece of Jesse James, a romantic and fabulous character of the Middle West, comparable to Robin Hood in England."

¹⁶ *Art News*, April 1949, pp. 30-39; *Art Digest*, April 15, 1949, p. 12; *New York Times*, April 3, 1949, II, p. 8; *Kansas City Star*, March 22 and April 1, 1949. *Life* magazine in its issue of July 31, 1950, reported that the Gallery spent \$250,000 on sixty-one works of art in 1949 and ran a full-page color photograph of Paul Gardner surrounded by new

acquisitions. Some of this publicity must have reached Florence, as Bernard Berenson is quoted as "making some inquiries about recent acquisitions of the Nelson Gallery of Art, in Kansas City." S.N. Behrman, *Duveen* (New York: Random House, 1952), pp. 168-169.

¹⁷ *Kansas City Star*, August 27 and 29, 1949; *New York Times*, August 28, 1949, p. 72; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. II, p. 286.

¹⁸ *Kansas City Star*, February 15 and 18, 1950; *New York Times*, February 17, 1950, p. 23; *Who Was Who in America*, Vol. II, pp. 396-397; Harvard University Archives.



Barbara and Milton McGreevy, with their gift of a Burne-Jones painting, 1976.

Edward Coley Burne-Jones

Musical Angel, 1878-96

Gouache on pieced paper; 64 1/4 x 22 3/4 inches; purchase: acquired through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Milton McGreevy through the Westport Fund [F59-59]

VII

LAURENCE SICKMAN, DIRECTOR

Laurence Sickman's directorship spanned a quarter of a century, which saw enormous changes in American society and in the role that museums played in their communities. When he was appointed director in 1953 art museums were still quiet places where collecting and connoisseurship were pursued, and a traditional audience of visitors passed through the doors. Twenty-five years later the conditions of American life had changed profoundly: failed presidencies, economic stagnation, and racial strife had all frayed the social fabric. By the conclusion of his directorship in the 1970s there had been an explosion of interest in art, and New York had overtaken Europe as the center of the art world. American museums swirled with ever larger numbers of visitors who were drawn by an awakened interest in art and art education and by mammoth exhibitions, which were ballyhooed in the press. Artists and museum directors became celebrities rivalling actors and politicians. Through all these bewildering changes Sickman and his trustees steered a relatively steady course, aided by the Gallery's location in a conservative, midwestern city, but at the same time stimulated by the new interest in museums and excitement about art.

By 1953 the Gallery's governance had passed to a new generation. J.C. Nichols and Herbert V. Jones, two of the original University



*Portrait of Robert B. Caldwell
Jes Wilhelm Schläpfer*

Trustees, had been succeeded by Milton McGreevy and David T. Beals Jr. The third University Trustee, Robert B. Caldwell, a prominent attorney, had been appointed before the war. McGreevy had long been interested in the Gallery and had been president of the Friends of Art. He and his wife, Barbara James



*David T. Beals Jr., photograph by Strauss Peyton
(NAMA Archives)*

McGreevy, were donors of the Westport Fund, from which grants were made for the acquisition of contemporary art, and they were also collectors of Old Master drawings. A graduate of Harvard and the Harvard Business School, Milton McGreevy was an investment banker and resident partner of Harris, Upham, & Co. David T. Beals Jr., a native of Kansas City and a graduate of Yale, was president of the First National Bank and a civic leader, serving



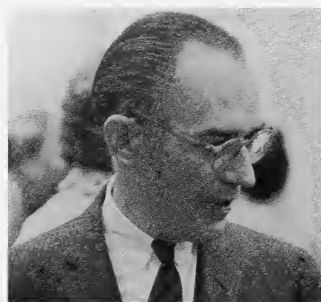
Laurence Sickman

on the boards of the University of Kansas City and the Midwest Research Institute, among many others. Though McGreevy never held the title of president of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, his interest and his financial abilities gave him the dominant role in the Gallery's affairs. All three — Caldwell, McGreevy and Beals — made a strong trustee team in this period of the Gallery's development.

The departure of Paul Gardner forced the Trustees to ponder the qualities and training that they should seek in a new director. "The Trustees feel it is important that a new man coming to the Gallery should be a thoroughly well grounded

scholar in European art and painting so that he might give particular attention to acquisitions in [this] field." They added that they would "want emphasis to be placed on someone who was well qualified to meet the public and strengthen the public relations situation at the Gallery" and that being "married to a woman of background, education, and charm . . . would be of material help to him in his relationship with those persons most interested in the Gallery and prospective benefactors."¹ It is not known whether they found candidates who possessed these qualifications. What is certain is that they decided that spring to appoint Laurence Sickman, the obvious and highly qualified in-house candidate. The minutes of the annual meeting, April 23, 1953, record that "The Presidents concurred with enthusiasm in the recommendation of the Trustees that Mr. Laurence Sickman be appointed Director of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art."

With a director who was also curator of Asian art, the Trustees turned their attention next to recruiting an expert in European art who could bring balance to the curatorial team. They found their candidate in Patrick Joseph Kelleher who joined the staff in February 1954, with responsibility



Patrick Joseph Kelleher

for European and contemporary art. A native of Colorado, like Sickman, Joseph Kelleher graduated from Colorado College and received the master's degree and doctorate from Princeton. He won the Prix de Rome and studied at the American Academy from 1947 to 1949, and in 1950 became curator of the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo. His tenure at the Nelson Gallery was marked by notable acquisitions of European painting and by concerted efforts to strengthen the Friends of Art in its collecting activities. At the same time Ross Taggart, who had come to the Gallery in 1947 as registrar, was appointed assistant curator with responsibility for ancient art, European decorative arts, and American art. At the time of his appointment, Taggart was working at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and had earlier received his master's degree in fine arts from Harvard. James Roth was made conservator, and George McKenna rounded out the staff as registrar.

This new staff turned immediately to the agreeable task of buying art. Sickman summarized his views on acquisitions in an addendum to the annual report for 1954, insisting that the first criterion must always be the quality of the work of art. Condition and price were also important, and attention should be paid to the balance of the collection. Because the Asian collections were so strong, he emphasized the need to build up the Gallery's holdings in European painting and sculpture, and to buy in other fields as opportunity might offer.

Following these guidelines Kelleher acquired a number of distinguished Old Master paintings. In his first year alone he bought Nicolas de Largillière, *Portrait of Augustus the Strong* (54-35), Sir Thomas Lawrence, *Mrs. William Lock of Norbury*

(54-36), and a neoclassical portrait of the Comtesse de Langeron (54-66), then attributed to Jacques-Louis David but now assigned to Rose Ducreux. There was no let-up in 1955: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Battle of Constantine and Licinius* (55-40), Canaletto, *The Clock Tower in the Piazza San Marco* (55-36), John Constable, *The Dell at Helmingham Park* (55-39), and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Portrait of Paul Haviland* (55-41) came into the collection, along with sculptures by Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Bust of Benjamin Franklin* (55-76), and Auguste Rodin, *Adam* (55-70).² Perhaps Kelleher's greatest collecting coup was



Petrus Christus

***The Holy Family in a Domestic Interior*, c. 1460**

Oil on wood panel; 28 1/8 x 20 1/2 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust [56-51]

the purchase in 1956 of Petrus Christus, *The Holy Family in a Domestic Interior* (56-51).³ Because of the great cost of this Flemish masterpiece — the largest price paid to that date for a work of art — the only

other acquisitions that year were the relatively modest William Hogarth, *An Evening at the Rose Tavern* (56-2), an oil sketch for Scene III of *The Rake's Progress*; and Jean Etienne Liotard, *A Frankish Woman and Her Servant* (56-3). An important panel by Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Three Graces* (57-1) was the first acquisition in 1957. That same year the Trustees also bought Claude Monet, *Water Lilies* (57-26), which added a major Impressionist painting to



Emil Nolde
Masks, 1911

Oil on canvas; 28 3/4 x 30 1/2 inches; gift of the Friends of Art [54-90]

the collection.⁴ Kelleher's last major acquisitions before he left Kansas City in June 1959 to become director of the Princeton University Art Museum, were Francois Boucher, *Landscape With a Water Mill* (59-1) and Sebastiano Ricci, *The Marriage Feast at Cana* (59-2). The Ricci had been painted for Lord Burlington and had hung at Chatsworth in the collection of the Duke of Devonshire until its forced sale to pay death duties in 1958. Inevitably Kelleher

made mistakes — a supposed Georges de La Tour failed to pass later scrutiny — but his legacy to the Nelson Gallery was a greatly enriched collection of European paintings.

Equally productive was Kelleher's leadership in advising the Friends of Art about its collecting activities. Kelleher became the Friends' shepherd. Nicholas Pickard wrote that though his tour of duty was only five years "it was so rich and enjoyable that to those of us who participated it seemed much longer."⁵ Kelleher laid out a program for acquiring the best art by concentrating the group's funds on a few major purchases. This strategy was aided by the fact that the Friends had made no purchase in 1953 and the following year there was a relatively sizable fund. By a stroke of good fortune Kelleher, Sickman, and the Friends' purchase committee found a group of five German Expressionist paintings in the estate of dealer Curt Valentin and bought the lot, but only after a close vote at the Friends' purchase meeting. The group included works by Max Beckmann, Karl Hofer, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Oskar Kokoschka, and Emil Nolde. The latter's *Masks* (54-90) is probably the star, judging by the number of times it has been borrowed by other museums.⁶

Other acquisitions by the Friends of Art during the Kelleher era included Marsden Hartley, *Himmel* (56-118), Pavel Tchelitchew, *Fatma* (57-31), and Yves Tanguy, *At the Risk of the Sun* (58-68). The purchase of the Tanguy took five ballots, with "written votes, standing votes, and a stuffed ballot box" before the verdict was decided by a vote of 116 to 102.⁷ The Friends group also made its first purchases of modern sculpture, buying works by Jacques Lipchitz, *Theseus* (57-98) and Gaston Lachaise, *John Marin* (57-99).⁸ The Gallery was also the recipient

of many gifts during this time, for, as Sickman noted, "Mr. Kelleher has accomplished a great deal in encouraging private collectors and stimulating a lively interest in contemporary art."⁹ William T. Kemper presented Grace Hartigan, *Broadway Restaurant* (F57-56), and Mrs. Alfred B. Clark (formerly Mrs. Logan Clendenning) gave funds which were later invested in Franz Kline, *Turin* (F61-23). At this same time the playwright William Inge gave two paintings by Willem de Kooning, one being the modern masterpiece *Woman IV* (56-128).

During the same period Ross Taggart was adding selectively to the collection of ancient art, including Egyptian objects such as *Kneeling Pharaoh* (53-13) and a bronze and wooden *Ibis* (58-4), Roman gold necklaces (56-77, 56-78) and a bust of *Antinous* (59-3), and a rare set of four Byzantine lamps (57-106 to 109). There were relatively few American paintings acquired in the 1950s. George Caleb Bingham, *Canvassing for a Vote* (54-9), a genre painting long thought to be lost, turned up in a private collection in Florida from which the Trustees bought it. James Roth skillfully removed Bingham's paint from the original canvas and laid it down on a new one. Other Bingham paintings came by gift, notably *Portrait of Vestine Porter Stark* (55-1), which was presented by Maud Stark Guinotte, daughter of the sitter. In this same decade the Trustees made a start on acquiring African art by buying two seventeenth-century Benin sculptures, *Memorial Head of an Oba* (58-66) and *Warrior and Attendants Plaque* (58-3).

Meanwhile, Sickman had not been idle in the Asian field. He continued to acquire Indian bronzes, the market then offering a number of outstanding examples at modest prices. He reported to the Trustees in 1953 that "The Gallery collection of

South Indian bronzes is now the best in quality in the Western hemisphere."¹⁰ He urged the Trustees to buy Japanese art, in which the Gallery's collections were weak. Chinese art in all media was acquired too, with special emphasis on bronzes and paintings. "At present, the collection of Chinese paintings is second only to those of the Freer Gallery, Washington, and the Museum of Fine Arts,



Willem de Kooning
Woman IV, 1952/53
Oil, enamel, and charcoal on canvas; 59 x 46 1/4 inches; gift of Mr. William Inge [56-128]

Boston," Sickman told the Trustees.¹¹ The Gallery's reputation in the field of Asian art was enhanced by the publication in 1956 of *The Art and Architecture of China*, by Laurence Sickman and Alexander Soper. This book became a classic text, going through many

editions, and is still in print thirty-seven years later.¹² Sickman also served in those years as editor of the *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*.

Art also came to the Nelson Gallery from other generous benefactors, the foremost being Frank P. Burnap who continued to add to the collection of English pottery. Ross Taggart prepared a catalogue of the Burnap Collection in 1953. After a reviewer pointed out that the collection contained few examples of English delftware, Burnap dived back into the market and spent the last four years of his life buying the best delftware he could find.¹³ He was still actively collecting it and other wares until the day of his death, November 8, 1957, aged ninety-six.¹⁴ Robert B. Fizzell was another generous donor whose gifts of prints and engravings enhanced the Gallery's holdings in this area. During these years Mr. and Mrs. Joseph S. Atha acquired outstanding pieces of English silver for the Gallery, including *Covered Punch Bowl* (58-65) by Benjamin Pyne. The generosity of Mr. and Mrs. John W. Starr brought to the Gallery on its twenty-fifth anniversary their collection of European and American miniature portraits, with works by such masters as Nicholas Hilliard and Richard Cosway. The Starrs added to the gift in 1965 their special collection of miniatures by John Smart.

Besides building the permanent collection in the 1950s, the Gallery embarked on an ambitious program of special exhibitions. The year 1953 began modestly with shows of local painting and photography, but picked up momentum in April with a very popular exhibition of "American Ancestor Portraits," which were drawn from local collections. The Gallery celebrated its twentieth anniversary in December 1953 with no fewer than four special exhibitions. In the Central Loan Gallery the staff

assembled the twenty European paintings which best represented the scope and quality of the collection.¹⁵ A loan exhibition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French paintings, all borrowed from other museums; new acquisitions; and "Friends of Art in Retrospect" filled three other galleries. These exhibitions contributed to the marked increase in attendance, which rose from 155,805 in 1952 to 177,603 in 1953.

Three years later, in 1956, there was another bonanza of special exhibitions, beginning with "The Century of Mozart," a celebration of Mozart's bicentenary, which was organized by the Gallery in conjunction with the University of Kansas, the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra, and Linda Hall Library. It included paintings, sculpture, furniture, and decorative arts and ran for six weeks in January and February. "It was the most ambitious exhibition [ever] organized by the Gallery and occupied nine rooms. . . . There were 22,206 visitors and the opening was marked by a record daily attendance of 4,164."¹⁶ The year ended with another winning exhibition, "Private Collection of Walter P. Chrysler," which also drew large crowds. Total attendance for 1956 was 195,978, again suggesting that special exhibitions were certain draws for the public. The next year featured "Treasures from the Morgan Library," which included a Gutenberg Bible and a wealth of Old Master drawings. It was followed by the seventh annual "Mid-America Annual," an invitational juried show for artists in an eight-state area, which was a project each year of the Junior League. This exhibition always attracted a lively crowd interested in contemporary art. The rising cost of putting on special exhibitions was covered in part by the Gallery's share of the proceeds from the annual Jewel Ball benefit.

Attendance of 255,285 in 1958 broke all previous records. Again, special exhibitions were credited with attracting the public. The year opened with the much-publicized and controversial show "Winston Churchill the Painter," sponsored by Joyce C. Hall and Hallmark Cards.¹⁷ The first venue was in Kansas City, with the other stops being the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the Smithsonian Institution. In spite of a blizzard, 5,427 people came to the opening, which was also attended by Sir Harold Caccia, the British Ambassador, and other notables.¹⁸ The Churchill show was followed by the first Collectors' Market, an event sponsored by the Friends of Art, which allowed visitors to buy the paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts on display; "Floating World: Art of Japan in the Edo Period," with the recreation of a traditional Noh theater and a Japanese garden; and the "Twenty-fifth Anniversary Show," which was an array of recent acquisitions.¹⁹ The growing costs of organizing exhibitions was lamented by Sickman in his Annual Report for 1959, a year which also had a number of good exhibitions — Mayan art, Folger silver, and Hirshhorn sculpture — but none with the popular appeal of Churchill. The link between exhibitions and attendance was conclusively demonstrated in the late 1950s and set one of the important patterns for the Gallery's future.

While special exhibitions attracted adult visitors, the Education Department was developing programs which would serve children and adults in ever increasing numbers in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. The new director of junior education, James E. Seidelman, who was appointed in 1952, revitalized old programs and created new ones.

Some idea of the scale and reach of the Education Department's activities can be gained by comparing the number of adults and children who took tours: in 1953 it was 51,186, while a decade later in 1963 it was 124,012.²⁰

Educational activities were divided into adult and children's programs. As a general rule Sickman and the curatorial staff conducted the adult programs, including the all-important docent training courses each fall. Sickman, Kelleher, Taggart, and later Ralph T. Coe were all stimulating and informative lecturers, and they focused on the permanent collection and special exhibitions. The curators also addressed various adult groups, such as the Art Study Club and the American Association of University Women, and gave public lectures on a variety of themes. Later they also served as adjunct instructors in art history at the University of Kansas City and the University of Kansas.

In 1953 children's programs fell under four headings: Tours, Creative Arts Classes, Saturday Programs, and special exhibits in the Little Museum. The Department was dependent on volunteers to staff the tour program, and here it was generously served by the Junior League of Kansas City, Missouri, the Junior Service League of Independence, and the Girl Scouts. Eight specialized tours were correlated with school curricula in English, history and social studies, and the arts. Creative Arts Classes, held on Saturday mornings in the spring, fall, and summer, were always over-subscribed. Enrollment in 1953 was 705, and an innovation that year was simultaneous classes for parents. Saturday classes were held in the afternoons with the "sole purpose of providing good juvenile entertainment." Films, stage productions, marionette shows, and games were all part of

the fare. There was no charge, and Seidelman reported that at Atkins Auditorium "the guards are deluged with hundreds of children." Attendance for the year was 15,928. The Little Museum offered children's exhibitions, often related to the themes of the tours, such as Indian, Knights and Armour, and Oriental. Seidelman concluded his report in 1953 by restating his mission, which was "to bring thousands of school-age children and their parents to the museum where they may understand, appreciate, and enjoy the treasures which belong to them."²¹

Ten years later Seidelman, who inspired confidence and enthusiasm and attracted community support, had assembled a corps of capable staff members and volunteers — such stalwarts as Kay Wright, Grace Mintonye, Effie Harnden, Ann Lawrence, Josephine Sanditz, and Margaret Rymar — who together had made the Gallery's education programs a lively presence in the community. With a grant from the Junior League four films were produced for use in schools to introduce the subject of the tours; the films were also broadcast on educational television. A Junior Library had been created in 1961 with a grant from the Junior League; after two years it had twelve hundred volumes and was staffed by nine volunteers from the Guild of the Friends of Art. Improvements were introduced in the tour program, and its scope was extended by adding 107 guides from the Friends of Art who gave tours of special exhibitions. Volunteers also put together Creative Arts Kits which were sold to schools. A full schedule of exhibits filled the Junior Gallery, including in 1961 "Youth Imagines," which attracted much favorable comment from the fifteen hundred art educators who attended the Art Education Association Conference in Kansas City that year.

Classes were also successful and were designed to have special appeal for children.

Puppet and marionette classes had unusually high attendance, there was an overflow enrollment for the special "Art in Nature" and "Creative Holiday" classes, and the Kansas Extension Classes also had peak attendance. New projects and creative ideas were introduced in both Pre-School and Creative Arts Classes, resulting in one of the most satisfactory courses of study we have ever had. All classes have been observed throughout the year by art educators and visitors from art centers and museums.²²

It was a special merit of all the activities of the Education Department that they generated income, so that in 1963, for example, only \$17,484 was needed in additional support from the Gallery's budget. When he departed in August 1968, Seidelman left a legacy of community support for the Gallery's education programs which, under his direction, had attained national recognition.

Volunteer efforts, which sustained many of the Education Department's programs, reflected the growing role that the Friends of Art played in the life of the Gallery. Started originally as a group to collect modern art, the Friends of Art had grown after the war and had taken on some of the attributes of a membership organization. Jane Rosenthal, long-time staff member who served the Friends and later had charge of public information, wrote: "One of the most gratifying experiences for the staff in 1952 has

been the emergence of the Friends of Art as an active and interested group supporting the Gallery."²³ Membership in the 1950s grew gradually from 734 in 1954 to 850 in 1956, the latter, a new high, which was achieved by the membership chairman, Mrs. R.C. Kemper Jr. Again, the annual report sounded a bullish note: "The Friends of Art form the nucleus of an ever-growing group of intelligent, discriminating, and civic-minded citizens who are aware of the many benefits derived from a close association with the Gallery and its collections."²⁴ Successive presidents — William T. Kemper, Francis W. Bartlett, David Mackie, Perry Faeth, and Nicholas Pickard — provided excellent leadership, which was in harmony with the aims of Sickman and the Trustees.

By the end of the decade membership had passed one thousand, and the Friends had initiated several key services. The need for a restaurant and a members' room was met by a committee of volunteers under the direction of Mrs. Tracy Weltmer, who organized and staffed the refreshment lounge on the north mezzanine. Mrs. George Bunting took charge of a new Sales and Rental Gallery, whose goal was to place art in members' homes by offering paintings and prints for sale or rent at reasonable prices. This innovation was a real service in an era before the advent of commercial galleries in Kansas City. Mrs. Frederic James, Mrs. Jerome Scott, Mrs. George C. Dillon, and Mrs. Morton I. Sosland helped Bunting run the Gallery, which was stocked from New York dealers and from Mid-America exhibitions. A third activity of the Friends was the volunteer guides, chaired and trained by Mrs. Julian Rymar and Mrs. Josephine Sanditz, who gave adult tours of the collections and special exhibitions. The

decade ended with a spectacular fund-raiser, a concert by Maria Callas, which was organized by David Stickelber and raised nine thousand dollars for the Friends of Art. The 1960s would see still more activities and a larger membership, with the Friends adding sponsorship of special exhibitions to their original mission of purchasing contemporary art.

All these projects got ready support from the Trustees, who were themselves former officers of the Friends of Art. At the same time the Trustees were initiating important changes in the way the Gallery was managed and financed. The chief one was the creation of the Nelson Gallery Foundation in December 1954. The Foundation, which has since become the legal entity which operates the Gallery, was designed to receive and disburse monies outside the William Rockhill Nelson Trust. The Foundation could, for example, purchase contemporary art; it could also invest its funds in corporate stocks and bonds, which the Trust was not permitted to do under the terms of Nelson's will. The next year the Trustees, working with the Board of Parks and Recreation and with the Midwest Research Institute, agreed to sell eight and one-half acres of land south of 47th Street, between Locust and Oak streets, to the Park Board for the purpose of creating a cultural center. Hare and Hare acted as consultants on this plan to create a mall that would reach from the Gallery to the Midwest Research Institute. Carl Milles, the Swedish sculptor, was commissioned to design a fountain as a memorial to William Volker. After many delays the cultural center was dedicated in September 1958.²⁵ The fountain was erected the following year, and the whole scheme was completed in 1961 when the last piece of ground was cleared by the razing of twenty-four Nelson houses.

Meanwhile, there had been a change in the ranks of the University Trustees. Robert B. Caldwell died on September 3, 1956, aged seventy-four, after sixteen years of effective service; his successor, Menefee D. Blackwell, also an attorney, was elected in December 1956. Blackwell, forty years old, was a veteran of World War II and held a number of other civic offices. He joined McGreevy and Beals in leading the Gallery into the new decade of the 1960s.

¹ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, November 24, 1952, NAMA Archives.

² *Illustrated London News*, September 10, 1955, p. 451.

³ *Art News*, January 1957, pp. 34-35; *Art Quarterly*, Spring 1957, pp. 112-113; *Connoisseur*, January 1958, p. 271; and *Illustrated London News*, January 26, 1957, p. 143.

⁴ The Trustees resisted buying Monet's water lilies until the students of the Kansas City Art Institute presented a petition urging its purchase. The Kansas City picture is the right side of a triptych; the left side is now in the St. Louis Art Museum and the center is in the Cleveland Museum of Art.

⁵ Pickard, "Friends of Art," p. C11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. C12-13.

⁷ *Kansas City Star*, November 7, 1958.

⁸ Though not funded by the Friends of Art, the acquisition of Aristide Maillol, *Ille de France* (A54-94) added another important twentieth-century sculpture to the collection at this period. It was acquired through the estates of Mary Atkins and

Ellen St. Clair and is always displayed in the Atkins wing.

⁹ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1956, NAMA Archives.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1953, NAMA Archives.

¹² Laurence Sickman and Alexander Soper, *The Art and Architecture of China*, 3rd. ed., Pelican History of Art Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹³ *Illustrated London News*, June 27, 1953.

¹⁴ *Kansas City Star*, November 8, 1957; *Antiques*, March 1958, pp. 260-263; *Connoisseur Yearbook*, 1958, pp. 93-96; and *Illustrated London News*, September 27, 1958, p. 526. The value of the Burnaps' gifts to the Nelson Gallery was calculated at \$300,000.

¹⁵ The paintings were by Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Goya, El Greco, Velázquez (now School of Velázquez), Boucher, Don Lorenzo Monaco, Lorenzo di Credi, Titian, Bronzino, Master of the Housebook, Tiepolo, Claude, Guardi, Hals, Hans Baldung (now Erhard Altendorfer), Gainsborough, van Gogh, Hobbema, and Gauguin.

¹⁶ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1956, NAMA Archives.

¹⁷ A number of museum directors felt that an amateur painter should not be given an exhibition in a serious art museum, no matter how illustrious his achievements in other fields. Alfred Friedlander, editor of *Art News*, wrote the introduction to the catalogue and defended the exhibition in an editorial, "Churchill Pinxit et Fecit," *Art News*, February

1958, p. 19. See also *Time*, February 10, 1958; *Illustrated London News*, February 1, 1958; and *New York Times*, January 19, 1958, p. 71, and January 23, 1958, p. 8.

¹⁸ The artist's daughter, Sarah Churchill, was also supposed to attend but "at the last minute she slapped a taxi driver in Los Angeles" and was detained by the authorities. Interview with Barbara James McGreevy by Michael Churchman, November 8, 1990.

¹⁹ Frank Davis, "News from Kansas City," *Illustrated London News*, February 7, 1959, p. 222.

²⁰ Annual Reports to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1953 and 1963, NAMA Archives.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1953.

²² Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1963, NAMA Archives.

²³ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1952, NAMA Archives.

²⁴ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1956, NAMA Archives.

²⁵ *New York Times*, September 20, 1958.



Art classes at the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, 1956
Joe Gregg, left, and Robin Bowe.

VIII

T H E 1 9 6 0 ' S

The decade of the 1960s was one of the most interesting and exciting periods in the history of the Nelson Gallery, led by Laurence Sickman and Ross Taggart, with the addition of Ralph T. Coe, and supported by volunteers of outstanding ability who were committed to the Gallery's goals. It was a heady period for the Friends of Art, which grew in numbers and continued to expand its interests beyond acquiring modern art to include education, exhibitions, services for members, and encouragement of private collecting. Exhibitions during this era had a quality and an appeal that attracted large audiences and attempted to enlighten and challenge them about a great range of timely themes. By the mid 60s the Gallery had also reached something of a crisis in its continuing quest to acquire art of the highest quality. Rising costs of operation reduced funds available for art purchases. At the same time prices for art rose dramatically, adding to the squeeze on acquisition funds. All of these developments were played out against a changing background, which moved from the optimism of the Kennedy era to the social conflict and economic downturn that accompanied the Vietnam War during the Johnson years.

The Gallery's leadership at the beginning of this period was augmented by the arrival of Ralph Tracy Coe, who came in September 1959 as curator of painting and sculpture, succeeding Patrick J. Kelleher. Ted Coe had grown up with art in

Cleveland where his father, a manufacturer of steel forgings, was a collector of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings, and a patron of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Coe majored in art history at Oberlin College and got a master's degree in American architecture from Yale University. From New Haven he went to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where he was visiting assistant and studied Renaissance bronze sculpture under Sir John Pope-Hennessy. Coe's next assignment was as assistant curator at the National Gallery in Washington before coming to Kansas City.¹ Besides his interest in French nineteenth-century painting, Coe also had done special work in American studies and contemporary and primitive art. An enthusiast and a collector himself, he inspired these interests in others and encouraged a whole generation in Kansas City to appreciate and collect painting and sculpture.

One of the phenomena of the 1960s was the growth of special exhibitions, and here Coe — along with Sickman, Taggart, and McKenna — made a remarkable contribution, starting with "The Logic of Modern Art" in the winter of 1961. This exhibition aimed to show the evolution of modern painting from Cézanne to 1960 and to trace the antecedents of Expressionism, Cubism, and Abstraction. "The visitor to this exhibition should keep continually in mind the following question," Coe wrote in the catalogue: "Given the background to contemporary art

and the character of our times, how else can the contemporary artist paint but as he does?" The exhibition aimed to "set forth the connecting links between the major styles and schools" and to make available "something of the variety, richness, and intensity of expression attendant upon what may well promise to be one of the great periods of Western Painting."² The exhibition, which included eight paintings from the Albright-Knox Gallery, attracted 43,500 visitors, provoking outrage and bewilderment among some, but also going a long way with many others to creating a new climate of appreciation for contemporary painting. One immediate purpose was to assist the Friends of Art in selecting its 1961 purchase. Coe included in the exhibition two loans from dealers of Cubist works which he wanted the Friends to consider. The Friends of Art in fact bought one of them, a collage by Juan Gris, *Book, Glass, and Bottle on a Table* (F61-10), in preference to a Picasso collage of the same period. This purchase added a much-needed example of Cubism to the Gallery's collection. The most recent painting in the exhibition, the Franz Kline, *Turin* (F61-23), of 1960 was also acquired by using funds given by Mrs. Alfred Clark. Coe recalled that the Kline "was violently disliked at the highest level," but the Trustees relented and grudgingly approved its purchase.³

Coe followed "The Logic of Modern Art" the next year with "The Imagination of Primitive Man," which was accompanied by much publicity and brought fifty thousand people to the Gallery to see outstanding works of African, Oceanic, Native American, and Central American art. Other special exhibitions followed, culminating in 1968 in "The Magic Theater," which he organized in collaboration with the Performing Arts Foundation. Eight artists were commissioned to create environments that

were meant to demonstrate that today's "art is psychic rather than formal in nature." Light, circuitry, strobe-firing devices, mirrors, prisms, "all these phenomena have replaced traditional media" in order "to engage the visitor's whole psyche," according to the press release. The exhibition received wide press coverage, was constantly crowded, and was held over an extra month.⁴ Attendance was 81,985.

The decade was filled with other noteworthy exhibitions, beginning with the "George Caleb Bingham Sesquicentennial Exhibition" in 1960 and concluding with "African Sculpture" in 1970, with a variety of stimulating shows in between. In 1962 Mr. and Mrs. Morton D. May of St. Louis lent their German Expressionist paintings, and that same year Joyce C. Hall and Hallmark Cards sponsored "The Nativity," which filled Kirkwood Hall with crèches from the collection of Alexander Girard, the architect and folk art collector, who came from Santa Fe to do the installation. The highlight of 1963 was "The Paintings and Drawings of Vincent van Gogh," an enormously popular exhibition, which was lent distinction by the presence of the artist's nephew, Vincent, and his wife. "Thomas Hart Benton Retrospective Exhibition" was the summer attraction in 1963. "Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy from the Collection of John M. Crawford, Jr." came to the Nelson Gallery at the end of that year, after opening at the Morgan Library in New York. Laurence Sickman was the editor of and a contributor to the catalogue.

The Nelson Gallery was also a stop on the tours of two large exhibitions, "The Art of Iran" in 1964 and "The Art Treasures of Turkey" three years later. Ross Taggart organized an intriguing exhibition, "The Taste of Napoleon," in celebration of the bicentenary of Napoleon's birth. It drew on the gifts of neoclassical furniture and decorative arts from Dr.

Harry J. Renken of Dallas and included a number of distinguished loans. The exhibition turned out to be the only recognition by a major American museum of Napoleon's anniversary and the contribution of his age to the arts, and thus received a great deal of attention.⁵ The catalogue by Taggart, with an introduction by Lincoln Kirstein, was an important scholarly achievement. Another popular exhibition that same year (1969) was the "Roy Lichtenstein Retrospective." Throughout the 1960s the Mid-America Annual continued to offer regional artists a juried exhibition with judges of national stature and the opportunity to win purchase prizes and to sell their works.

Special exhibitions attracted large crowds, and attendance figures showed a marked increase during the decade, starting from a base of 235,494 visitors in 1960, a year which did not offer any memorable shows. By 1963, the year of the van Gogh, Benton, and Crawford exhibitions, attendance had risen to 327,688. The next two years there were slimmer offerings and the number of visitors went down, only to rebound in 1965. The high for the decade was 399,104 visitors in 1968, the year of "The Magic Theater." In his reports to the Trustees about attendance Sickman emphasized the importance of attractive exhibitions and abundant publicity. To oversee publicity efforts he engaged Donald D. Jones and later Donald L. Hoffman, who used print media, radio, and television to promote the Gallery's exhibitions and educational programs.

While attendance grew throughout the 1960s, membership in the Friends of Art expanded early in the decade and then reached a plateau. There were 1,573 members in 1960, 1,903 in 1962, and 3,099 in 1964, but only 2,992 four years later. In an effort to enlist younger members, the Friends organized the Guild of the Friends of Art in 1960 for

members thirty-five years and younger and enrolled four hundred members the first year. Guild members were energetic and initiated various projects, the most popular being charter flights to Europe, which were usually sellouts. The Friends' service to members continued to be a strong theme in the 1960s. The Education Committee performed prodigies of labor in giving tours and organizing adult programs; the Sales and Rental Gallery set high standards of taste and quality and encouraged collectors; while the coffee lounge refreshed visitors with food and drink.

The Sales and Rental Gallery's shows often complemented the selections that the Friends Purchase Committee presented annually to the membership for acquisition. Coe took over from Kelleher the assignment of guiding the Purchase Committee as it made the rounds of New York dealers. He advised them on the Gallery's needs and urged the Friends to fill in gaps in the collection, while at the same time introducing them to younger artists and mixing sculpture with painting. "The Logic of Modern Art" gave a context to these efforts, and the acquisition of works by Gris, Kandinsky, Diebenkorn, and Rothko, along with the purchase of the Kline, were solid, even brilliant buys. Later purchases by the Friends of Art included Ernst Barlach, *Frenzy* (F65-18), Alexander Calder, *Tom's Cubicle* (F69-7), Jackson Pollock, *Number 6, 1952* (F68-18) and Jacques Lipchitz, *Bather* (F70-12), which all made a strong finish to the decade. An addition to the works of modern sculpture was Henry Moore, *Relief No. 1, 1959* (F68-19), which was purchased with money from the Mrs. Alfred B. Clark Fund and became the precursor of the later Henry Moore Sculpture Garden and collection. The Guild also acquired art when the younger members felt strongly about a work, such as Andy Warhol, *Baseball* (F63-16), the first example of Pop Art to enter the collec-

tion and reputedly the first acquisition of Pop Art by a major museum.

All the Friends of Art acquisitions were voted on at the annual meetings where lively discussion sometimes turned into rancorous debate, as in the case of the 1964 choice. The chairman of the Selections Committee that year was Susan Buckwalter, who had persuaded the artist Mark Rothko to allow two of his nonobjective canvases to be sent to Kansas City. "Debate is Fiery, Art is



Susan Chapin Buckwalter, with Elliot Norquist, 1964 (NAMA Archives).

Tranquil" ran the headline to the story on the Friends' meeting where both Buckwalter and Coe were furiously attacked. The main criticism seemed to be that the choice was limited to the works of one artist. "It seemed to me that if we missed getting a Rothko this time, we might never have another chance at one. The seriousness of his work was so important, and I was so convinced of its importance, that I was willing to open myself up to criticism," Buckwalter said.⁶ By a close vote the Friends purchased Mark Rothko, *Untitled No. 11, 1963* (F64-15) for twenty thousand dollars. R. Crosby Kemper Jr., who opposed "submitting to the will of authority in the organization," suggested creating another group, which would function without curatorial guidance,

and also advocated "opening a wing for the display of contemporary art. . . . Or, if that can't be done, why not a Museum of Modern Art in Kansas City?"⁷

Susan Buckwalter's husband, Charles, died the next year. In his memory she gave John Chamberlain, *Huzzy* (F64-8), a piece as controversial then as the Rothko, to the Friends of Art collection. Her contribution to the Gallery was tragically short: she took her own life later that year. Coe wrote in appreciation: "Her collecting activities, her Gallery seminars on modern art, her connections with artists and collectors, and her enthusiasm for all that seemed exciting and new conferred upon this area a sense of vitality which was otherwise missing. Her collection was unique in this part of the country and shed light where otherwise there was none."⁸ The family of Susan Buckwalter gave the last piece she bought, Claes Oldenburg, *Switches Sketch* (65-29), to the Gallery in her memory.

While the Friends of Art and its leaders were buying modern and contemporary art, Sickman and the curators were pursuing their program of acquisition, with continuing emphasis on strengthening the Gallery's holdings in European painting and sculpture. The decade opened with a bountiful harvest: Camille Pissarro, *The Garden of Les Mathurins* at *Pontoise* (60-38), a large canvas shimmering with pure color, which had been shown at the Impressionist Exhibition of 1877; Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Last Judgment* (60-37), with its graphic depiction of the circle of Hell; a wooden sculpture of 1480, *Saint George and the Dragon* (F60-45); a Greek bronze mirror from Cumae of about 450 B. C. (60-84); Japanese screens; and three East Indian stone sculptures. In 1961 the Gallery acquired a remarkable Spanish painting, Francisco de Zurbarán, *The Entombment of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (61-21), which was acquired from the collection of Marshall Soult in

France. A Rembrandt drawing and works of primitive art from Maori and Mayan cultures were also added to the collection.

It was in 1961 that the Kress Collection was formally given to the Nelson Gallery, but not before Coe arranged a number of friendly trades and exchanges. Of the original loan, nine of the twenty-two paintings and two of the four sculptures were kept. Of the final selection, the stars of the early Italian paintings are probably Bernardo Daddi, *The Virgin and Child Enthroned* (F61-61), and Giovanni Bellini, *The Virgin and Child* (F61-66). Coe also chose Baroque pictures, which were then unfashionable, including Giuseppe Bazzani, *The Departure of the Prodigal Son* (F61-57), Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, *Allegory of Vanity* (F61-69), and both of the pair by Gaspare Traversi, *The Arts - Music* (F61-70) and *The Arts - Drawing* (F61-71) which had previously been split between two museums. A further selection, somewhat eccentric to the group of Italian pictures, was Salomon van Ruysdael, *Landscape With Ferry* (F61-72), which Coe reportedly spotted hanging on the wall of the Kress Foundation offices in New York.

There were no outstanding European paintings acquired the next year when Sickman lamented the exorbitant prices which dealers asked, but the Gallery did buy a royal Egyptian portrait, *Head of Sesostri III* (62-11). By splitting the cost between two years the Gallery also managed to acquire in 1963 Jan Gossaert (Mabuse), *Portrait of Jean de Carondelet* (63-17). Also at this time two American paintings, including Thomas Moran, *Grand Canyon* (63-44), entered the collection from the bequest of Katherine Harvey, a longtime patron of the Gallery. In the Asian area Sickman was delighted to acquire a Southern Sung handscroll, which he had seen in China in the 1930s and which had thereafter eluded

his persistent efforts to acquire it. For a trifling sum he bought Ma Yüan (attributed), *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing* (63-19) at a summer auction at Parke-Bernet when other museums and collectors were apparently asleep or out-of-town.⁹ Sickman's acquisitions at this period were focused on Japanese art and Chinese furniture.

By mid-decade income from the William Rockhill Nelson Trust was almost wholly absorbed by the Gallery's operating expenses and very few funds were left for acquisition. In 1961, for example, the Trust had expended \$310,092 on art, but this sum had dropped to \$100,485 in 1965 and reached an all-time low of \$76,884 in 1969. There were a few notable purchases: in 1966, for example, "an adjustment of funds, of a kind not likely to recur again," allowed the purchase of a long-sought Rubens, *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (66-3).¹⁰ The next year the Trustees approved the purchase of Jan Steen, *Fantasy Interior with Jan Steen and Jan van Goyen* (67-8).¹¹ Otherwise, there were no major acquisitions for the rest of the decade. There were additions of furniture and decorative arts, including a commode by Cressent and a generous fund for the purchase of English furniture for the Georgian Room from Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer. Of considerable interest also was the acquisition in 1967 of seven pieces of gold jewelry (67-21/1-7) from the tomb of Tutankhamen, which had been given by a member of the archaeologist Howard Carter's family to a surgeon, an amateur Egyptologist who had attended Carter. These pieces included two gold sequins which bear the cartouche of Smekh-ka-Re.¹² In spite of these interesting acquisitions, the period of the late 1960s and early 1970s was a kind of trough between the earlier period of ebullient buying by Kelleher and Coe and the later affluence provided by an Anonymous Donor, which allowed the Nelson Gallery to reenter the art market in the late 1970s.

It was primarily to compensate for rising operating expenses and to preserve funds from the Nelson Trust for acquisitions that the University Trustees authorized the establishment of the Society of Fellows of the Nelson Gallery Foundation. Begun in December 1965 with Herman R. Sutherland as its first chairman and modelled on the patron group of the Morgan Library, the Fellows enrolled 224 members the first year. Dues of three hundred dollars a year accrued to the Foundation and provided the Trustees with unrestricted income, which grew from \$77,044 in 1966 to \$162,960 in 1971. Col. C.M. Peeke was the first executive secretary of the Fellows.

In addition to inaugurating the Society of Fellows, the Trustees continued to exert strong leadership in all areas. David T. Beals died in 1963, and his successor was Cliff C. Jones Jr., a progressive-minded insurance executive and civic leader. In turn Jones resigned at the end of 1969, and Herman R. Sutherland, partner in a family-owned lumber business and a longtime Gallery leader, was appointed in his place. The Trustees also oversaw changes in the building, which were often related to new installations and to renovation of original spaces, which were then more than thirty years old. The Starr Miniature Room was handsomely installed by John Yeon of Portland, Oregon, who designed many of the new spaces in this period. An anonymous gift in honor of Mrs. Herbert V. Jones in 1966 permitted the creation of a new gallery for the display of the growing collection of Chinese furniture. The Georgian period room was refurbished through the generosity of Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer, who had earlier made a gift to acquire suitable furniture for it. The bequest of Mrs. Frank Grant Crowell in 1969 made possible planning for the creation of new galleries on the second floor of the west wing.

Though the Gallery was served by staff whose tenures were often as long as they were fruitful, there were a number of significant changes in the late 1960s. Col. C.M. Peeke resigned from the Fellows office. Jane Rosenthal, longtime head of programs and publicity, and executive secretary of the Friends of Art, retired in 1967 and was succeeded by Glenna Youngstrom. James Seidelman resigned in 1968, after an especially productive sev-



James Seidelman, with, left, Mrs. E. Kip Robinson, and Mrs. Rex L. Diveley

enteen-year tenure as director of junior education, to become director of the Living Arts and Science Center in Lexington, Kentucky. The retirement of Clarence Simpson as superintendent marked the end of an era. For thirty-five years Simpson had been looking after the building and grounds, and his knowledge and his love of the Gallery made him a unique figure. Earlier in the decade Craig Craven had succeeded Frank Crabtree as curator of design, and at the end of the decade Ellen R. Goheen joined the curatorial staff. By the end of the 1960s Sickman and his staff had strengthened the Gallery's collections and programs and were preparing to meet the challenges of the new decade.

¹ *Kansas City Star*, September 10, 1959 and March 21, 1962; *Who's Who in America*, 1980-1981, p. 655; *Who's Who in American Art*, 1993-1994, pp. 219-220.

² Ralph T. Coe, *The Logic of Modern Art: An Exhibition Tracing the Evolution of Modern Painting from Cézanne to 1960* (Kansas City: The Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, 1961), p. 11.

³ Pickard, "Friends of Art," p. D3.

⁴ Grace Glueck, "Everything's Up-To-Date...," *New York Times*, June 9, 1968; Mario Amaya, "Kansas Letter: Magical Immersion," *Financial Times*, June 19, 1968; *Time*, June 7, 1968; *Newsweek*, June 24, 1968; *Art International*, September 1968; *Arts and Artists*, July 1968; and *L'Oeil*, August-September 1968.

⁵ *Antiques*, October 1969, p. 464; *Apollo*, February 1970, pp. 153-155.

⁶ *Kansas City Times*, May 1, 1964. See also Pickard, "Friends of Art," pp. D5-D8.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1965, NAMA Archives.

⁹ Sickman reminiscences at the Fiftieth Anniversary meeting of the Society of Fellows, November 15, 1983; Churchman, *Sickman*, p. 19. The moral of this long quest, Sickman said, was best expressed by Robert Louis Stevenson when he wrote, "The things I seek are seeking me."

¹⁰ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1966, NAMA Archives.

¹¹ "A Dutch Mannerist Memorial," *Time*, February 16, 1968.

¹² Letter and memorandum from David H. Newman, Spink & Son, to Ross E. Taggart, May 26, 1967, Registrar's files.



Ralph Tracy Coe

IX

S I C K M A N A N D C O E

Laurence Sickman's leadership continued with undiminished vigor into the new decade of the 1970s. His prestige in the museum world as a connoisseur who was also a capable administrator added to the reputation of the Nelson Gallery. Indeed, the 1970s were years of signal accomplishment, starting with the addition to the building of new galleries and facilities. There were also remarkable acquisitions in all fields. The decade was also highlighted by two spectacular exhibitions — the Chinese archaeological show and "Sacred Circles" — which brought the Gallery international recognition. Yet these outward successes masked growing stresses and weaknesses within the organization. Operating budgets grew tighter every year, and the small and dedicated staff was stretched almost beyond endurance. Services and infrastructure could not support the growing demand for programs, and new initiatives were thwarted by lack of funds. In the early years of Ralph T. Coe's administration these needs had reached almost crisis proportions, and the staff and Trustees took serious stock of the Gallery's situation in the Bowron Report of 1980. This analysis, coupled with financial necessities, led eventually to the decision to build the Gallery's financial assets through a capital fund-raising campaign on the occasion of the Gallery's fiftieth anniversary.

These contradictory themes of apparent affluence and success on the one hand and growing



Herman R. Sutherland, left, and Menejee D. Blackwell, longtime University Trustees, at the opening of the Crowell Wing, 1976.

internal strains on the other are nowhere better illustrated than in the area of acquisitions. As operating expenses rose perilously close to the level of income from the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, the

regular flow of unrestricted funds for buying art was almost extinguished. Yet, thanks to a few open-handedly generous donors — Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer, R. Crosby Kemper Jr., Mrs. George H. Bunting Jr., and the mysterious Anonymous Donor — the Gallery was able to add some of its most desirable works of art to the collection. The decade of the 1970s was also the period when substantial improvements were made to the building. The west wing galleries were completed with gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Parker and Mr. Earle Grant, from Mrs. Frank Grant Crowell's bequest, and from Mrs. Spencer. It was Mrs. Spencer who also provided funds for the art reference library. Mr. and Mrs. Elmer F. Pierson created a sculpture garden on the Gallery's southeast terrace. At the end of the decade the Joyce C. Hall family and foundations refurbished Atkins Auditorium and roofed over Rozzelle Court, two of the most successful renovation projects in the Gallery's history.

These successes in acquisitions and building improvements did not add to the Gallery's operating income, however. It is true that the Friends of Art grew in membership over the period, from 3,460 in 1970 to 5,735 in 1982, hitting a high of 6,840 in 1978. The Friends' added income was available to support services for members and to augment annual purchase grants. But these increases did not add directly to the Gallery's income. The revenue from the Society of Fellows did grow substantially from \$84,987 in 1970, an off-year because of Col. Peeke's retirement, to \$162,960 in 1971; by 1977 it had reached \$206,751. The Fellows' income continued to climb, achieving \$424,580 in 1982. From 224 individual and 43 corporate members in 1970, the Fellows expanded to 617 individual and 72 corporate

members by 1982. Indeed, the Society of Fellows represented a considerable success, producing substantial unrestricted income and allying civic and business leaders to the Gallery. But it was not enough to keep pace with the needs which had become apparent by 1982, such as expanding the curatorial and conservation staffs, enhancing educational offerings, supporting library acquisitions, and providing such essential services as computers, a museum photographer, a business office, and a development office.

These long-term trends in no way diminished the brilliance of Sickman's last years as director. Building projects, the fortieth anniversary, and the Chinese archaeological show were only some of the highlights. Sickman's colleagues were a small, but effective team: Ted Coe as assistant director and curator of paintings and sculpture; Ross Taggart, as senior curator wearing three hats for ancient, American, and decorative arts; Marc Wilson, curator of Oriental art; George McKenna, curator of prints and registrar; and Ellen Goheen, curator of twentieth-century art. Forrest Bailey had succeeded James Roth as conservator. Craig Craven and later Michael Hagler were curators of design. Larry Eikleberry and Effie Harnden ran the Education Department. Incumbents in the library included Anne Tompkins and Katherine Haskins, while Janice McKenna presided over the slide library — as she still does. The team of Nicholas Pickard and Kathleen Taggart ran the Fellows office with consummate skill. Sherwood Songer, successor to Clarence Simpson, was superintendent and de facto business manager. And June Finnell as executive secretary used a deft blend of fear and efficiency to keep the whole place going.

There were plenty of projects for the staff to tackle, beginning with the building of Parker-Grant Gallery. Intended for the display of the Friends of Art collection and conceived as an enormous loft-like space, which would be hospitable to the large dimensions of contemporary art, it was constructed on the south side of the upstairs west wing. The funds were generously provided by Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Parker and her brother Earle W. Grant, who were among the founders of the Friends of Art and



Mrs. George H. Bunting Jr., with Laurence Sickman, right.

longtime patrons. The gala opening was held on May 13, 1971, with an exhibition made up of Friends of Art selections and accompanied by an informative catalogue and history of the Friends' purchases written by Ted Coe.

The next year Mr. and Mrs. Elmer F. Pierson contributed funds for the construction of a sculpture garden, which was created on the southeast terrace from plans drawn by Hare and Hare. The Pierson Sculpture Garden was dedicated in

November 1972 and made a handsome setting for works by Rodin and Moore, along with the Piersons' gift of Jacques Lipchitz, *Peace on Earth* (F72-20). Another project at this same period was the installation of the former Friends of Art gallery (224) as a space for the display of Chinese paintings. John Yeon was the architect, while Marc Wilson acted as engineer and dealt with critical conservation issues, especially light levels and humidity, which would affect paintings on paper and silk. The Chinese painting gallery was opened on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary in 1973, when there was a celebration in the form of gifts to the Gallery and a particularly glamorous party arranged by Barbara Rahm, assistant curator of special events and impresario of so many of the Gallery's events, with Mary Lou Blackwell as co-chairman and David Stickelber and Carol Price as chairmen of the acquisitions fund.

By the mid-1970s there was only one unfinished space left in the Gallery, the west side of the second floor, and the Trustees decided to celebrate the American Bicentennial by creating much needed new galleries. Funds were available for construction and maintenance from the bequest of Mrs. Frank Grant Crowell, and these were augmented by money left from the gifts of the Gerald Parkers and Earle Grant, and by an additional gift from the Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation. Because this large space of 50 by 160 feet was also 25 feet high it was possible to build a mezzanine, and in this way the Gallery was able to garner a total of 16,000 square feet. The designer was John Yeon and the architects were John Hinchcliffe and Stuart Hutchison, who created handsome spaces using four kinds of marble and rare woods. One particularly impressive feature was the Crowell Stairway where

the *Amida Buddha* (31-141/1) was installed. This gilded wood statue of the fifteenth century was acquired in 1930 by Langdon Warner in Nara, Japan, but its nine-foot height had made it almost impossible to exhibit. Another of the new spaces was the Japanese Screen Gallery, which was greatly admired for its restrained elegance. The Spencer Gallery for Impressionist paintings and an extension to Parker-Grant for early twentieth-century works completed the second floor. The mezzanine accommodated a large gallery for Native American, African, and Oceanic art and separate galleries for Japanese and for Persian art.

Sickman's last building project, inaugurated in 1977, was the Kenneth and Helen Spencer Art Reference Library. The Gallery's library had been something of a step-child over the years, moving in the early 1960s from the southeast corner to the southwest corner of the building and then spilling over into adjacent offices and corridors. The collection of books, periodicals, and auction catalogues had been built up slowly with spasmodic grants of money from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Merrill Trust, and the Kress Foundation and by private patronage from Mrs. Massey Holmes in the early days, then the McGreevys, John Bender, the Spencers, Donald D. Jones, and Donald Hoffman, and gifts in memory of Patricia Crowe Morgan and Virginia Conklin Wood, among many others. The library had fifty-five hundred volumes in 1955, approximately fifteen thousand volumes in 1970, and by the middle of the decade the librarian was desperate for more space. The solution was to excavate the southwest terrace, creating a huge underground stack area, and to provide offices and a reference room on the ground floor. Mrs. Spencer saw to it that the reference room was particularly hand-

some, with a carved Georgian fireplace and corner cupboards decorated with a garniture of Chinese Export pots.

When Sickman and his staff were not planning new spaces, they were busy organizing special exhibitions. There were a number of worthwhile and attractive shows during the early 1970s, including Rodin sculpture, David Douglas Duncan's timely photographs of the Vietnam war, the Navajo blanket, Louise Nevelson's wooden sculptures, and retrospectives of the work of Edward Hopper and Thomas Hart Benton. Important as these exhibitions were, they paled into relative insignificance compared to the Gallery's mid-decade blockbuster, "Archaeological Finds of the People's Republic of China."

The Chinese archaeological show was a product of the political detente between the United States and China, which had been initiated by President Nixon's visit to Peking in February 1972. The Chinese government decided to use art as part of its effort to rehabilitate the regime's image in the West and to send abroad an exhibition of archaeological material that had been recovered from historic sites in China since 1949. The resulting exhibition of 385 pieces, including the flying horse from Kansu and the royal jade suit, had been sent in 1974 to Paris, where it caused a sensation. The exhibition travelled to other European capitals and then to Toronto before going to the United States. Given the Chinese government's political agenda, the first American venue was, of course, the National Gallery in Washington, where the exhibition was accompanied by massive publicity and drew record crowds. A second American venue was contemplated, and evidently the Nelson's Chinese collection, Sickman's reputation, and the timely assistance of Leonard

Garment, a member of the White House staff, along with Kansas City's central location, tipped the scales in favor of the Nelson Gallery. "The Chinese Show" is still remembered as the greatest exhibition ever to come to the Gallery and to Kansas City.



Claude Monet
Boulevard des Capucines, 1873/74
 Oil on canvas; 31 1/4 x 23 1/4 inches; purchase: the Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation Acquisition Fund [F72-35]

The preparations were complex. Fifteen galleries and one-third of Kirkwood Hall had to be cleared and prepared to receive the varied materials, which ranged from prehistoric fossils to decorative arts of the Yüan dynasty (fourteenth century). Marc Wilson was placed in charge of the exhibition and all its ancillary programs: editing the catalogue, obtaining a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and advertising and promotion, among many other duties. Measures for crowd control were

worked out with the Kansas City Police Department; a network of off-site parking spaces was organized, with jitney service to the Gallery; and the coffee lounge, reinforced by volunteers, geared up to feed the expected rush of visitors. The exhibition ran for seven weeks, from April 20 through June 8, 1975, and attracted 280,000 visitors, roughly 5,700 per day. Visitors came from all parts of the country, even though it was announced just prior to the opening that the exhibition would make a third stop in San Francisco. Sickman rightly received kudos from the entire community for his role in bringing the exhibition to Kansas City.

Despite the glamor of exhibitions, Sickman was always focused on the goal of adding significant works of art to the permanent collection. Certainly the collecting coup of this decade, engineered by Ted Coe and funded by Mrs. Spencer, was the acquisition of Claude Monet, *Boulevard des Capucines* (F72-35). This historic canvas depicted the view from the window where the first Impressionist exhibition had been held in 1874. It belonged to Mrs. Marshall Field IV, of New York, who had intended to leave it to the Metropolitan Museum. She reportedly became disenchanted with the Metropolitan's director, Thomas Hoving, because of his sale of Impressionist paintings from the collection to raise cash for the purchase of a Velásquez. In an article entitled "Should Hoving Be Deaccessioned," the art historian John Rewald wrote that "a former benefactor of the Metropolitan" put this "magnificent painting on the market instead of willing it to the Museum."¹ "What is evidently New York's loss is clearly Kansas City's gain," wrote Donald Hoffman, art critic of the *Kansas City Star*. He added that at the preview in Kansas City in January 1973, "hun-



Mrs. Kenneth A. Spencer and Laurence Sickman with her gift, 1976.
Odilon Redon

Vase of Flowers, c. 1912

Pastel on paper; 26 3/4 x 20 1/4 inches; purchase: the Kenneth A. and Helen F. Spencer Foundation Acquisition Fund [F76-1]

dreds of people ventured into the rain and snow yesterday afternoon to see Paris in the snow."²

Later in 1973 additional funds from Mrs. Spencer allowed the purchase of another Impressionist work, a pastel by Edgar Degas, *The Ballet Rehearsal* (F73-30). Its price of \$1,025,000 — the highest yet paid by the Nelson Gallery for a work of art — was as awesome as its provenance. *The Ballet Rehearsal* was the first painting by Degas to be acquired by an American collector, having been bought in 1876 from the artist by Louisine Elder (later Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer) on the advice of her friend Mary Cassatt.³ A further gift came from Mrs. Spencer in 1976 when she gave Odilon Redon, *Vase of Flowers* (F76-1), to celebrate the opening of the

Spencer Gallery of Impressionist paintings in the Crowell Wing.

At about the same time the Gallery's pre-eminence as the holder of works by Thomas Hart Benton was established by Benton's bequest at his death on January 18, 1975. His legacy to the Gallery was eighteen paintings, including the canvases of *The American Historical Epic* (F75-21/1-10) and *Hollywood* (F75-21/12), and ten drawings. It seemed appropriate that Benton's work should find a permanent home in Kansas City, where he had lived and worked since 1935.⁴

Indeed the Gallery was fortunate to receive many gifts and bequests at this period — some years, a cornucopia of treasures. Höchst porcelain from Mrs. E.B. Berkowitz, Hester Bateman silver from Mrs. Leonard C. Kline, Worcester porcelain from Mrs. Lambert Cadwallader, a Roman marble herm from Mr. and Mrs. Herman Sutherland, additional miniatures from the Starrs, twentieth-century paintings from Louis and Rheta Sosland, and museum-quality furniture from Mrs. Spencer were only some of the gifts that the Gallery received from generous friends. No one was more intent on building the Gallery's collections than Mrs. George H. Bunting Jr., who almost singlehandedly developed the collections of Japanese art and who made significant contributions to the Chinese and Indian collections as well. Edo-period ceramics, handscrolls, and album leaves from Japan, a stone sculpture from India, and a pair of Chinese *huang-hua-li* wood chairs, all of the highest quality, entered the collection thanks to Mrs. Bunting's connoisseurship and generosity.

The William Rockhill Nelson Trust and the Nelson Gallery Foundation, though burdened with the Gallery's operating expenses, did provide some funds for acquisitions, often of furniture — for

example, the magnificent Weisweiler commode (F70-43) — and of Asian art. Chinese paintings were added to the collection: Jen Jen-fa, *Nine Horses* (72-8); an anonymous thirteenth-century handscroll, *Traveling Among Streams and Mountains* (74-35); a Chin dynasty landscape, *Winter Mountains* (79-9); and Ch'iao Chung-ch'ang, *Illustration to Second Prose Poem on the Red Cliff* (F80-5). Other Asian acquisitions of note included *Striding Lion: Mount for the Buddhist Deity Monju* (77-51), a Japanese wooden sculpture of the thirteenth century.

Towards the end of his quarter century as director of the Nelson Gallery - Atkins Museum, Laurence Sickman received a number of honors that recognized his leadership in the field of Chinese art. At the heart of his connoisseurship was what Ross and Kathleen Taggart called "his unerring eye, akin to perfect pitch," which aided him in selecting objects of the first quality.⁵ This eye had been trained at Harvard by Denman Ross who, though retired from the faculty, gave Sickman twice weekly lessons in connoisseurship. "Ross was, Sickman reflected in retirement, the most influential man in his life," teaching him aesthetic judgment and urging him to "fill his mind with visual images of the best objects of their kind."⁶ When he got to China this acuity was recognized at once. John King Fairbank recalled that Larry Sickman " 'had eyes' (*yu yen-ching*) as the Chinese put it and was already a master of style, provenance and authenticity."⁷ Sickman's wide learning and his ability to read and speak Chinese were of inestimable value to him also. The eminence which he enjoyed is attested by the frequency with which he was consulted by collectors and other museums. John D. Rockefeller III used his advice on a number of occasions. Wen Fong, curator

of Chinese art at the Metropolitan Museum, recommended to Thomas Hoving that Sickman be called in to evaluate paintings in the collection of C.C. Wang, which the Metropolitan was considering for acquisition.⁸ Sickman was, of course, aware of his ability and occasionally noted its absence in others, remarking once of his collaborator Alexander Coburn Soper that his scholarship was superb, "but I wouldn't trust him to buy a snuff bottle!"⁹ Warren I. Cohen summed it up: "By mid-century, Sickman had emerged as the leading American authority on Chinese art."¹⁰

Among the many honors that came to Sickman was the Charles Lang Freer Medal, awarded by the Freer Gallery of Art, of the Smithsonian Institution, on September 11, 1973. Senator Hugh Scott read the citation, "For Distinguished Contribution to the Knowledge and Understanding of Oriental Civilizations as Reflected in their Arts."¹¹ Earlier in 1968 he had been awarded The Royal Order of Knight Commander of the North Star by King Gustav VI Adolf, a fellow collector; and in 1978 he received the Hills Gold Medal from the Oriental Ceramic Society in London. An honorary degree came from Columbia University on May 19, 1977, and afterwards there was a party of Sickman's friends at the Century Association.¹²

Sickman had advised the University Trustees of his intention to retire on January 31, 1977.¹³ They chose as his successor the Gallery's assistant director, Ralph T. Coe, who became the third director of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum. Sickman was made director emeritus and advisor to the Trustees. The next spring the Gallery mounted a special exhibition, "Hills and Valleys Within: Laurence Sickman and the Oriental Collection," to

honor Sickman's role in forming the Gallery's great Asian collections.

After his appointment Coe moved immediately to strengthen the curatorial staff. The Trustees approved the creation of a new position, curator of Renaissance and Baroque art, which was filled in June 1978 by Dr. Edgar Peters Bowron. Bowron, who also served as administrative assistant to the director, was a graduate of Colgate University and received his doctorate from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He came to Kansas City from the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, where he had been curator of Renaissance art. Dr. Marilyn Stokstad and Dr. Chu-ting Li, members of the faculty at the University of Kansas, were named adjunct curators of Medieval and Chinese art, respectively. Coe assumed responsibility for nineteenth-century art, while Ellen R. Goheen served as curator of twentieth-century art. Ross Taggart, Marc Wilson, and George McKenna continued in their respective bailiwicks.

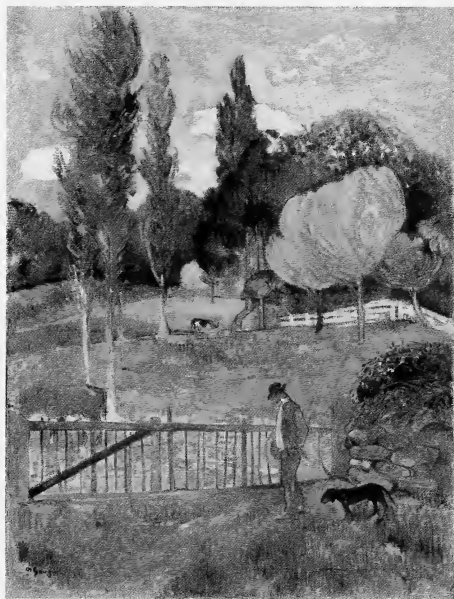
Before his appointment Coe had organized an exhibition in London, sponsored by the Arts Council of Great Britain, in celebration of the American Bicentennial. "Sacred Circles: 2,000 Years of North American Indian Art" opened at the Hayward Gallery and ran from October 7, 1976 through January 16, 1977. Planning for "Sacred Circles," with its nine hundred objects, many of which had to be transported from the United States to London, was a huge undertaking. Patrons of the exhibition were Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and Nelson A. Rockefeller, vice-president of the United States, who were chairmen of a blue-ribbon committee drawn from both sides of the Atlantic. Margaret Weltmer Phinney, a Kansas Citian then living in London, worked tirelessly on the organiza-

tion and finances. The exhibition, with its glamorous associations with the lore of the American frontier, was immensely popular in Great Britain. "Proving there's a lot more to Indians than Crazy Horse, war whoops and arrows" ran one headline in the *Times* of London.

Enthusiastic civic and financial support from Kansas City's business leaders and foundations, and grants from both National Endowments, underwrote the cost of bringing the exhibition to Kansas City for its only American venue, April 16 through June 19, 1977. "Sacred Circles" proved to be the Nelson Gallery's second blockbuster, drawing 241,175 visitors and boosting the Gallery's attendance for the year to 480,224, the second highest in its history.

Though succeeding exhibitions did not have the drawing power of "Sacred Circles," they were nonetheless popular and significant shows. The Contemporary Art Society, an offshoot of the Friends of Art and loosely affiliated with the Gallery, sponsored "Christo: Wrapped Walkways" in October 1978, when Christo covered 105,000 square feet of the pathways in Loose Park in saffron-colored nylon fabric.¹⁴ An equally spectacular exhibition of public art the next year, also sponsored by the Contemporary Art Society, was Dale Eldred's show of eight related installations, perhaps the most memorable being a composition of four hundred fourteen-foot poles erected in the parkway on 47th Street in such a way as to reflect sunlight in changing color patterns.¹⁵ A somewhat different kind of exhibition in 1980 was "Shakespeare: The Globe and the World," containing literary and artistic material from the collections of the Folger Library. The Nelson Gallery and the Cleveland Museum collaborated that same year on a remarkable exhibition,

"Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting," drawn from the two institutions' distinguished collections and accompanied by a scholarly catalogue with essays by Laurence Sickman, Sherman E. Lee, Wai-kam Ho, and Marc F. Wilson. Other notable exhibitions at this period were



Paul Gauguin
Landscape, 1894

Oil on canvas; 36 1/4 x 27 1/2 inches; purchase: acquired through the generosity of an anonymous donor [F77-32]

"Duane Hansen Retrospective," "Korean Art Treasures," and "Old Master Paintings from the Collection of Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza."

Acquisitions during the late 1970s and early 1980s were dramatically focused around two major donors, with valuable contributions also from other patrons and from the Friends of Art. The

Anonymous Donor emerged suddenly from the ranks of the Society of Fellows and asked Sickman and Coe, through his lawyer, "to buy colorful paintings like that Paris view Mrs. Spencer bought for you."¹⁶ This request was accompanied by a check for \$1 million. Four other checks, each for \$1 million, followed; a total of \$5 million between August 1977 and December 1979. One gift was designated for endowment; the others were directed to acquisitions. All gifts were received through the donor's lawyer, except the last contribution, which was handed personally to Sickman in a rendezvous arranged for a Monday noon on the front steps, when the Gallery was closed and no one was likely to be around. The Anonymous Donor arrived in a white Cadillac, rolled down the window, handed Sickman an envelope, and told him to use the funds in any way he wished.

Sickman, Coe, and Bowron were only too pleased to follow the Anonymous Donor's wishes and acquired seven European paintings of outstanding merit. The first two purchases, perhaps in emulation of Mrs. Spencer's gift, were Paul Gauguin, *Landscape* (F77-32), a work painted in Brittany in 1894; and Mary Cassatt, *At the Theater (Woman in a Loge)* (F77-33), a pastel of brilliant coloring painted about 1879. These were followed by a pointillist landscape by Paul Signac, *Château Gaillard, Seen from the Artist's Window, Petit Andely* (F78-13), and a pastel by Edgar Degas, *Little Milliners* (F79-34).¹⁷ The next year Bowron acquired three Old Master paintings, which filled gaps in the collection: Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, *Still Life with Cat and Fish* (F79-2); Giovanni Paolo Panini, *View of the Piazza del Popolo, Rome* (F79-3); and Giulio Cesare Procaccini, *The Holy Family with Infant St. John the*

Baptist and an Angel (F79-4). The purchase of a Chinese painting was also made possible by these donations. The Anonymous Donor's gifts were both generous and timely, allowing the Gallery to make significant acquisitions just before the boom in art prices in the 1980s.

Also in the late 1970s the banker R. Crosby Kemper Jr., with liberal generosity, began the purchases of American paintings, which have done so much to build a representative collection of portraits,

landscapes, and genre scenes. John Singleton Copley, *Portrait of Mr. John Barrett* (F76-52) and *Portrait of Mrs. John Barrett* (F77-1), gave the Gallery a pair of eighteenth-century Boston portraits, while William Sidney Mount, *Winding Up (Courtship)* (F77-39), and Eastman Johnson, *The Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet and a Light unto My Path* (F79-12), added two attractive genre scenes. In the category of landscape Crosby Kemper acquired the luminist work by Martin Johnson Heade, *Marsh Scene* (F78-10),



Mr. and Mrs. R. Crosby Kemper Jr. with Alexander, Mariner, and Heather, viewing their gift.
Frederic Edwin Church

Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, 1870

Oil on canvas; 53 1/2 x 83 1/2 inches; gift of the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation [F77-40]

and the spectacular view by Frederic Edwin Church, *Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives* (F77-40). The Gallery had long wanted a painting by Winslow Homer and this need was handsomely met by the acquisition of *Gloucester Harbor* (F76-46). The gifts of Crosby Kemper made an occasion in December 1977 to show the Gallery's now enlarged holdings of American works, augmented by loans from other museums, in a special exhibition "Kaleidoscope of American Paintings: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries."¹⁸

At the beginning of the 1980s while the Gallery was acquiring remarkable works of art, there were also changes in its leadership. Barbara Rahm, who as assistant curator of special Gallery events had presided over previews and parties with rare taste and style, resigned in 1980. Mrs. George H. Bunting Jr., who had been assistant curator for the Sales and Rental Gallery and a collector of great discrimination, died in 1981. The death of Karen Dean Bunting deprived the Gallery of one of its most generous donors and effective advocates. Milton McGreevy, who had been a University Trustee for thirty-one years and whose devotion to the Gallery's interests had been a model of trusteeship, resigned his office in March and died shortly thereafter on July 1, 1980. His foresight in creating the Nelson Gallery Foundation in 1954 was one of the pivotal decisions in the institution's history. His successor was Donald J. Hall, chairman of Hallmark Cards Incorporated, whose leadership was immediately felt in a number of vital areas.

By 1980 the University Trustees faced a number of challenges. Brilliant acquisitions and the handsome new galleries of the Crowell Wing had created a somewhat deceptive picture of prosperity

that belied the real fiscal strains and overburdening of staff. Coe pointed out that the annual budget of \$1.2 million was far too small and that staff frustrations were mounting. He emphasized to the Trustees the "natural opportunity [which] exists in 1983 to put the Nelson Gallery in a more positive financial position for the future."¹⁹ The same theme was amplified in his report the next year: the staff was stretched to the limits, there was no museum photographer, no grants and development office, no publications department, and poor support of education. In short, the Gallery's infrastructure was overtaxed and in some areas nonexistent, hampering its ability to function effectively and to serve the community. Coe quoted Martin Friedman, director of the Walker Art Center, as saying that "the Nelson Gallery is the great 'sunken treasure' of the Midwest."²⁰ Fundraising, Coe concluded, should be the top priority for 1980 through 1983.

Indeed, fundraising did come to play a central role. The Trustees were spurred on by the unanimous contribution of \$1 million by the *Kansas City Star* during its centennial in 1980. With this gift in hand, the Trustees began to plan for the Gallery's fiftieth anniversary, engaging a consultant, establishing a development office, and directing the staff to study the Gallery's needs and to formulate a long-range plan to meet them. This study was undertaken by the Committee on the Future, which produced the Bowron Report in December 1980, named after the Committee's chairman, Edgar Peters Bowron. The Bowron Report not only established the agenda of the Gallery's needs and goals in the 1980s but also formed the basis for its appeal to the community for financial support. Bowron's committee formulated eight goals, which covered

acquisitions, reorganization of the administration, recruitment and compensation of staff, strengthening of the special exhibitions program, expanding the building, acquiring long-deferred technical equipment, reorganizing the Friends of Art as the general membership organization, and expanding the Society of Fellows.

The hopeful prospects envisioned in the Bowron Report came too late to encourage Ted Coe to continue as director. Though Coe's tenure as director was brief, his contribution to the Gallery, beginning with his arrival in 1959 and extending twenty-three years, was a distinguished one. His productive leadership of the Friends of Art, his knowledge of the art market in nineteenth-century and modern fields and in Native American art, and his nurture of collectors all stemmed from his wide learning and his warmth and enthusiasm, which

were shared with others. His interests had always been focused on the curatorial aspects of museum work, and perhaps the demands of administering a large institution, which had fallen behind the times, no longer appealed to him. At the same time he had committed himself to organizing an exhibition of contemporary Native American art as a successor to "Sacred Circles" and evidently came to feel that this enterprise, and similar curatorial activities, might make a more rewarding life. His request for a sabbatical leave was approved by the Trustees on March 8 and he subsequently resigned the office of director on June 30, 1982. Bowron had left previously to become director of the North Carolina Museum of Art. The appointment of Marc Wilson as Coe's successor and the agenda for change, which the staff and Trustees had embraced, set the stage for the sixth decade of the Gallery's growth.

¹ *Newsweek*, January 29, 1973, pp. 76-77; *Art in America*, January-February 1973, p. 29.

² *Kansas City Times*, January 22, 1973.

³ Louise W. Havemeyer, *Sixteen to Sixty: Memoirs of a Collector* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1961), pp. 249-250. *The Ballet Rehearsal* was not part of the Havemeyer Bequest to the Metropolitan Museum, but descended to her grandson, George J. Frelinghuysen, who sold it at Parke-Bernet in 1965. The buyer was Norton Simon, who resold it to the Marlborough Gallery, from which the Nelson Gallery bought it in 1973.

⁴ Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 204.

⁵ Ross and Kathleen Taggart, "Curator and Director," in Churchman, *Sickman*, p. 7.

⁶ Cohen, *East Asian Art*, p. 112.

⁷ John King Fairbank, *Chinabound: A Fifty-Year Memoir* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 41.

⁸ Hoving and Fong asked Sickman to grade the Wang paintings on a scale of A to D. "Larry Sickman complained to me that 'it isn't like elementary school grades; these things are too subtle and mysterious.' He suggested a grading system which would compare each painting to those in the holdings of Kansas City." Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 361.

⁹ Interview with Laurence Sickman by Michael Churchman, January 14, 1983.

¹⁰ Cohen, *East Asian Art*, p. 111 ff.

¹¹ "Fifth Presentation of the Charles Lang Freer Medal," Washington, D.C., September 11, 1973.

¹² "A Dinner to Honor Our Friend Laurence Sickman upon the Occasion of His Receiving the Degree of Doctor of Laws Honoris Causa from Columbia University May Eighteenth MCM LXXVII." This program contains an essay in appreciation by Marc F. Wilson.

¹³ William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustee minutes, January 18, 1977, NAMA Archives.

¹⁴ Ellen R. Goheen (Essay) and Wolfgang Volz (Photographs), *Christo: Wrapped Walkways* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1978).

¹⁵ *Art News*, November 1979, pp. 166-172.

¹⁶ Annual Report to the Trustees for 1977-1978, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Little Milliners* was another of Mrs. Havemeyer's pictures that descended to her grandson, Peter Freylinghuysen, from whom the Gallery purchased it.

¹⁸ See also the survey, with thirty-nine color illustrations, by Ross E. Taggart, "American Paintings in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri," *Antiques*, November 1982, pp. 1026-1039.

¹⁹ Annual Report to the Trustees for 1978-1979, p. 13.

²⁰ Annual Report to the Trustees for 1979-1980, p. 4.



Marc F. Wilson points out a Japanese screen to Barbara Bush on her visit to the Museum, May 1991.

X

THE WILSON ERA: NEW DIRECTIONS

The appointment of Marc F. Wilson as the fourth director of the Nelson Gallery came in the midst of a number of institutional changes. The authority of the director's office was broadened and Wilson was charged with carrying out ambitious plans for the institution's growth. At the same time the University Trustees expanded the institution's governance by adding associate trustees. New divisions were created within the Gallery's structure: a merged business office for the Trust and Foundation, a development office, and an enlarged registrar's office, among others. A whole new crop of curators joined the staff, some of them in newly created departments. Finally, as if to symbolize all these changes, the Trustees gave the institution a new name.

Wilson was eminently qualified to lead the Nelson Gallery into a new era. He had first come to the Gallery in 1967 as a Ford Foundation Fellow, following the completion of his graduate studies at Yale, from which he had also received the B.A. degree in 1963. After further study at the National Museum in Taipei, he returned to Kansas City in 1971 as associate curator of Oriental art, becoming curator in 1973. In addition to his scholarship in Chinese painting and calligraphy, he had acquired a broad range of administrative experience, organizing the Chinese archaeological show in 1975 and playing a key role five years later in the exhibition "Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting." Having charge of

the largest curatorial department had given him a breadth of understanding of museum operations, which was to prove valuable. At this same time the concept of the director's office was enlarged so that Wilson became in effect the Museum's chief executive officer, with enhanced authority to administer the Gallery in accordance with trustee policy.

At the center of the changes that were under way in 1982 was an expanded structure of governance. In December 1981 the three University Trustees had approved the creation of associate trustees as a way "to provide for greater participation in the affairs and functions of the Gallery."¹ The associate trustees would share in setting policy and approving programs and were excluded only from some of the fiduciary duties that were required under the will of William Rockhill Nelson. The associate trustees served three-year terms and could be reappointed for one additional three-year term. The honor of being the first appointees fell to Henry W. Bloch, Ilus W. Davis, Paul H. Henson, Irvine O. Hockaday Jr., Mrs. R. Crosby Kemper Jr., Mrs. William M. McDonald, John A. Morgan, Mrs. Morton I. Sosland, and James P. Sunderland.

One of the important decisions of the newly enlarged board of trustees was to change the name of the institution to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. The former names, the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum

of Fine Arts, were certainly cumbersome and often shortened to "the Nelson Gallery" or just "the Gallery." The legal entities, the William Rockhill Nelson Trust and the Nelson Gallery Foundation, continue in existence. The new name went into effect in the fall of 1982.

Many departments of the Museum were expanded and reorganized in the period 1982 to 1984, the most important being a new business office, which included the William Rockhill Nelson Trust. The business manager now took charge of computers, personnel, and the bookstore as well as payroll, guards, and building and grounds. He also supervised the new office of comptroller and later took over the management of Rozelle Court restaurant.

Equally pressing was the creation of a development office. Since 1980, when the *Kansas City Star* had pledged \$1 million to the Gallery, the Trustees had been engaged in planning a major fund-raising campaign. With Herman Sutherland as chairman of the Fiftieth Anniversary Fund, Arthur C. Frantze as consultant, and James Forbes as director of development, the campaign got into high gear. The Gallery had never before raised money in a campaign, and it took a great deal of deliberation and courage to agree on the ambitious goal of \$50 million.

The Fiftieth Anniversary Campaign was an asset-building program which would provide the added resources needed to sustain and enhance the Museum's activities. With leadership in place by December 1982 and \$8 million in pledges, the Campaign was given a magnificent lift by the announcement later that month of a combined \$11 million commitment from the Joyce C. Hall estate, Donald J. Hall, Barbara Hall Marshall, Elizabeth Ann Reid, Hallmark Cards Incorporated, and the Hall Educational Foundation. The Trustees were also anxious to include the wider community.

R. Hugh Uhlmann led the Friends of Art volunteers, who enthusiastically joined the effort. The Golden Anniversary Tablet invited the community to participate by investing \$250 over five years. By the end of October 1983 all these efforts had raised \$43 million. "During November and early December large and small gifts literally poured in, sometimes as much as \$250,000 per day, and commitments averaged over \$1 million a week. By December 10, 1983, on the fiftieth anniversary . . . , \$51.5 million had been committed."² Sutherland's hard work and enthusiasm and his wide knowledge of the Museum's community carried the day. The campaign was extended to the end of the fiscal year, April 30, 1984, when a grand total of \$58,123,187 had been reached.³ It was far and away the greatest philanthropic goal that the Kansas City community had ever achieved.⁴

Mrs. Philip F. Rahm emerged from retirement to orchestrate the fiftieth anniversary jubilee on the night of December 10, 1983. The Museum was filled with flowers and banners, which attracted 4,385 members and special guests. Visitors also saw thirteen galleries of European paintings, which had been hung with new cloth, repainted, and relighted, and new installations of twentieth-century and Native American art.

The improved installations reflected not only the community's investment of funds, but also the activity of a new generation of curators. Wilson's succession as director and the retirement of Ross Taggart from his many responsibilities at the end of 1983, in addition to the Trustees' decision to establish new curatorial departments, all contributed to an expanded curatorial staff. The first of the new generation was Roger B. Ward, who came in June 1982 as curator of European painting and sculpture after completing his doctorate at the Courtauld Institute in

London. Two new departments had been created and endowed by members of the Sosland family. Samuel Sosland established a fund to support the curatorship of American art, which was filled by Henry Adams, who came from the Carnegie Museum with a Ph.D. from Yale. The family of Sanders Sosland endowed the new curatorship of twentieth-century art, and the first incumbent was Deborah Emont Scott, who had previously been at the Memphis Brooks Museum. As part of their gifts to the Museum, the Hall family and foundations had endowed the Laurence Sickman Curatorship of Chinese Art, and this position was soon filled by Wai-kam Ho, a leading scholar who came from a similar post at the Cleveland Museum. Dorothy Fickle, an expert in Buddhist art, was the new curator of South Asian art. Joseph Kuntz had a brief but productive tenure as curator of European decorative arts; and he was followed, after a hiatus, by Christina Nelson.

Two new departments were part-time posts whose incumbents also held academic appointments at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. David Binkley, an expert in the sculpture and masks of central Africa, was appointed curator of the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, succeeding Mary Jo Arnoldi who departed after a brief tenure for the Smithsonian. The department of ancient art, also a shared appointment with the University, was filled by Robert Cohon, a scholar of Hellenistic and Roman art. Michael Hagler served as curator of design and installation until his untimely death in 1990; his successor, Andrew Meredith, came from the San Antonio Museum Association. George McKenna continued to preside over prints and photographs and now added drawings to his charge. He gave up registrarial duties; that department, long understaffed, was enlarged and Ann Erbacher was appointed registrar.

With this new team in place, the Museum was able to pursue its goals more effectively than in the past. Some old interests continued strong, prime among them, art acquisitions. The last ten years have been a challenging time in which to collect art. Prices soared to unheard-of heights until the onset of recession in 1990. The Museum's entire endowment would hardly have sufficed to buy one van Gogh. Indeed, the Museum had no regular acquisition funds, all its income being needed for operations. Yet there were opportunities to acquire art. High prices often meant that a consortium of donors had to be assembled in order to buy a painting. Fortunately there were windfall legacies that could be spent on art; and the Museum began to deaccession works that it would never display, often selling at high prices. Between 1982 and 1993 the Museum spent \$31.4 million on art, of which \$10.6 million came from deaccessioning.

Though dealing with the art market is necessarily an imprecise activity, in which chance and opportunity play a large part, the Museum did establish some guidelines for collecting. It was decided that emphasis would be placed on five areas, European art, American art, decorative arts, twentieth-century art, and African art. Asian art was difficult to acquire because the Museum's collections were usually superior to most of the objects that came on the market. Nonetheless, there were some notable acquisitions of Chinese art, including a set of ten T'ang dynasty tomb figures (F83-8/1-10), probably from the imperial burial grounds near Sian; and two albums of paintings, Shih-t'ao, *Landscape Album for Liu Shih-t'ou* (F83-50/1-12) and Tung Ch'ich'ang, *Landscapes in the Styles of Old Masters* (86-3/1-10). Funds from the Hall family and foundations made possible all these acquisitions. A number of outstanding examples of Japanese art were pur-

chased, thanks to the Edith Ehrman Memorial Fund. Old friends of the Asian department — Robert H. Ellsworth, John M. Crawford Jr., Mrs. De Vere Dierks, David T. Beals III, Karen Ann Bunting and Mr. and Mrs. O.G. Bunting, Mr. and Mrs. Earl D. Wilberg, and John S. Thacher — all continued their support.



Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun
Portrait of Marie-Gabrielle de Gramont, Duchesse de Caderousse, 1784

Oil on wood panel; 41 3/8 x 29 7/8 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust through exchange of the bequest of Helen F. Spencer and the generosity of Mrs. George C. Reuland through the W. J. Brace Charitable Trust, Mrs. Herbert O. Peet, Mary Barton Stripp Kemper and Rufus Crosby Kemper, Jr., in memory of Mary Jane Barton Stripp and Enid Jackson Kemper, and Mrs. Rex L. Dineley [86-20]

In the area of European art there were also generous donors. Clarke S.P. Bunting gave a landscape, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *View of Lake Garda* (80-44).⁵ Dr. and Mrs. Nicholas S. Pickard presented Camille Pissarro, *Wooded Landscape at L'Hermitage, Pontoise* (F84-90). A pair of neoclassi-

cal landscapes by Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Seaport with Antique Ruins: Morning* (F84-66/1) and *Coastal Harbor with a Pyramid: Evening* (F84-66/2), both exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1753, were acquired with funds generously provided by Sophia K. Goodman. The Westport Fund and the McGreevy family made it possible for the Museum to acquire a terracotta bust by Augustin Pajou, *Jean-François Ducis* (F83-22). This sculpture was in addition to the generous bequest of Milton McGreevy that included a distinguished collection of Old Master drawings. Katherine Kupper Mosher left a generous bequest in 1984 for the acquisition of art. The gift of Mr. and Mrs. Louis L. Ward made possible the addition to the collection of Gaetano Gandolfi, *The Assumption of the Virgin* (F92-1).

In acquiring European art Roger Ward had two goals in view. One was to add to areas of the collection where there was already strength, such as Baroque and Caravaggesque paintings; the other was to fill gaps. In the early 1980s there was a brief but heady period when the Trustees were agreeable to spending some of the Fiftieth Anniversary Funds on art. Three Baroque paintings were acquired by this means: Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called Il Guercino, *Saint Luke Displaying a Painting of the Virgin* (F83-55); Dirck van Baburen, *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (84-25); and Joachim Anthonisz. Wtewael, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (F84-71). Later in this period the Museum acquired an exceptional portrait by Elisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, *Portrait of Marie-Gabrielle de Gramont, Duchesse de Caderousse* (86-20). There was also the opportunity to purchase Gustave Caillebotte, *Portrait of Richard Gallo* (89-35), which gave the Museum an important work by that artist. There were no examples of French romanticism in the collection, and this lack was remedied by the purchase of Eugène Delacroix,

Christ on the Sea of Galilee (89-16) and Jean-Louis-André Théodore Géricault, *The Oath of Brutus after the Death of Lucretia* (92-35). A Baroque painting by Il Cavaliere d'Arpino, *The Virgin and Child with Saints Peter and Paul* (91-14), formerly in the Papal collection, was acquired in 1991.

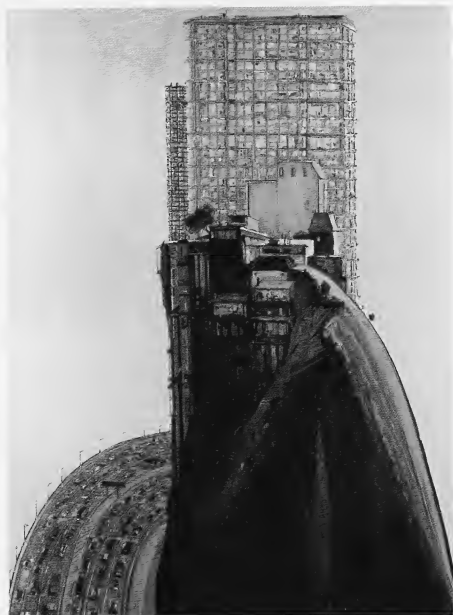
In the American department the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation presented a group of portraits of exceptional interest, starting with Thomas Eakins, *Portrait of Monsignor James P. Turner* (F83-41). Two works by John Singer Sargent followed in 1986, the formal portrait of Mrs. Cecil Wade (F86-23), painted in London in 1886, and an informal oil sketch of Francisco Bernareggi (F86-26) of 1907. A masterpiece in stained glass by John La Farge, *Peonies Blowing in the Wind* (F88-34), was also a gift of the Kemper Foundation. A New Mexican landscape, George Bellows, *Pueblo Tesuque, No. 2* (F84-65) came by gift from Julia and Humbert Tinsman, while a Hudson River School landscape by John Frederick Kensett, *Woodland Waterfall* (86-10) was presented by Mrs. George Reuland through the W.J. Brace Charitable Trust. The Museum acquired Thomas Hart Benton, *Persephone* (F86-57) with a substantial grant from the Yellow Freight System Foundation and generous assistance from Richard J. Stern, Mrs. Herbert O. Peet, the Doris Jones Stein Foundation, and the Loose Trust. Later in the decade John Frederick Peto, *Books on a Table* (90-11) was added to the collection. The bequest of Ben and Clara Shlyen made possible the purchase of George Bellows, *Frankie, the Organ Boy* (F91-22).

The curator of decorative arts, Christina Nelson, has focused on reinstalling the Burnap Collection, but has also been able to acquire notable examples of continental ceramics, with the help of Mrs. E.B. Berkowitz, Mr. and Mrs. Richard M. Levin, Mr. and Mrs. Perry E. Faeth, and other donors. The

generous bequest of Lillian M. Diveley in 1990 also provided an endowment for acquisitions. The department is pursuing an initiative to collect decorative arts of the twentieth century.

The twentieth-century department benefited early in the decade by the Trustees' decision to commit substantial sums to the purchase of contemporary art, buying in one year James Rosenquist, *Venturi and Blue Pinion* (F84-35/a-c) and Robert Rauschenberg, *Tracer* (F84-70). During the fiftieth anniversary the Friends of Art sought additional contributions to expand its purchase fund. A three-panel canvas by Jennifer Bartlett, *Boy* (F83-67a-c); sculptures by Nancy Graves, *Zaga* (F84-27); Jim Dine, *The Crommelynck Gate with Tools* (F84-76); and Frank Stella, *Birkirkara* (F84-77) gave the Museum's collection excellent examples by these artists. The last gift from the Friends of Art, with additional funds from the Nelson Gallery Foundation, was Wayne Thiebaud, *Apartment Hill* (F86-4). Norman and Elaine Polsky and Fixtures Furniture entered into a collaboration to acquire paintings and sculpture, and in this way a number of distinguished contemporary works came into the collection, including Susan Rothenberg, *Endless* (F86-50/2). In 1989 the department acquired Ad Reinhardt, *No. 10* (89-17), and to celebrate the reinstallation of the twentieth-century galleries in 1992, with funds from the bequest of Dorothy K. Rice, acquired Ellsworth Kelly, *Untitled*, 1960 (F92-3). Julia and Humbert Tinsman presented Elie Nadelman, *Standing Girl* (F91-62) as a gift to the twentieth-century collection.

A number of outstanding works of African art came to the Museum from Mr. and Mrs. Morton I. Sosland, including a Hemba *Standing Male Figure* (81-53) from Zaire. The Museum acquired *Standing Figure* (F84-50) from Bena Lulua and later in the



Wayne Thiebaud
Apartment Hill, 1980

Oil on linen; 65 x 48 inches; purchase: acquired with the assistance of the Friends of Art (F86-4)

decade purchased *Memorial Head of an Oba* (87-7), a bronze sculpture from the kingdom of Benin. The assistance of the George H. and Elizabeth O. Davis Fund permitted the acquisition of a *Female Mask* (F92-18) from Songye and of a *Royal Beaded Throne* (F92-13) from the Cameroons. In the area of Native American art the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Henry I. Marder has allowed the acquisition of a number of pieces of pottery, including an *Olla* (F88-10) from the Anasazi period in Socorro.

All these acquisitions encouraged the Museum to publish articles and books about the growing collections. Roger Ward's catalogue, *The Bountiful Decade: Selected Acquisitions, 1977-1987*,

highlighted recent acquisitions.⁶ The next year Ellen R. Goheen brought out *The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, a survey of the most notable works in all departments.⁷ Henry Adams produced a *Handbook of American Paintings* in 1991. The sixth edition of the Museum's handbook appeared in the fall of 1993.⁸ Scholarly catalogues of the collection are underway, with the volumes on Italian painting, American painting, and prints likely to appear sometime in the mid-1990s. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation gave the Museum a challenge grant to establish an endowment for publications, and contributions from the Sprint Corporation and bequests from Emily Rothschild and Grace L. Frick completed the funding.

During the last decade exhibitions have also presented many challenges to Wilson and his staff. At the beginning of the decade so-called blockbuster exhibitions continued to hold sway. Kansas City and the Nelson-Atkins Museum were invariably bypassed in favor of Chicago, Texas, or the West Coast. Wilson and the Trustees were aware of the demand for popular exhibitions, but faced handicaps in attracting them to the Nelson-Atkins. Indeed, in the early part of the 1980s the exhibition schedule seemed thin, with some notable exceptions: "Repeated Exposure" in the spring of 1982, organized by George McKenna, showed more than nine hundred objects and demonstrated the influence of photography on printmaking since 1839. One-artist shows by Jennifer Bartlett and Wayne Thiebaud were very well received, and an exhibition of the work of Frederic James in the fall of 1986 gave recognition to a well-known area artist. Attractive and interesting as these exhibitions were, none could be classified as a blockbuster.

Beginning in the summer of 1986 the exhibition scene started looking up. The first of the new

wave of shows was "Maya: Treasures of an Ancient Civilization," which presented glamorous objects in gold and jade, as well as ceramics and sculpture, from Mayan sites in Central America and Mexico. The exhibition also offered the opportunity to include groups from the Hispanic community in special pro-



Memorial Head of an Oba, 16th century

Brass; height: 9 1/8 inches; purchase: Nelson Trust through the generosity of Donald J. and Adele C. Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Herman R. Sutherland, an anonymous donor, and the exchange of Nelson Gallery Foundation properties [87-7]

grams. In the spring of 1988 the Museum was fortunate to be able to present "Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Masterpieces: The Courtauld Collection." Kansas City was included only after San Francisco dropped out of the tour, which took the Courtauld paintings to Cleveland, the Metropolitan, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Kimbell in Fort Worth. Among the forty-eight paintings were such famous images as Manet, *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* and Renoir, *La Loge*. Sir Adam Courtauld Butler, grandson of the collector, attended the gala opening. The exhibition, sponsored by the IBM Corporation, attracted 121,000 visitors.

"Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original" was the first large travelling exhibition organized by the Nelson-Atkins. A centennial retrospective of Benton's work, it was curated by Henry Adams, who wrote the catalogue-biography, and was underwritten by Crosby Kemper and the United Missouri Bank. A ninety-minute television documentary produced by Ken Burns accompanied the exhibition. There was also massive local and national publicity, much of it lively and controversial.⁹ The opening in Kansas City in April 1989 was attended by Benton's daughter Jessie Benton, his grandchildren, and his ninety-two-year-old sister, Mildred Benton Small. The exhibition went on to the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Whitney Museum in New York, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The Benton exhibition also received a special grant from the Missouri Arts Council. All of the Museum's exhibitions during this period were assisted by the Council, which made its first award of funds in 1970 and has continued to support both special exhibitions and educational programs. The National Endowment for the Arts has also supported exhibitions, as well as a variety of other special projects.



Beaded Throne, late 19th century

Wood, fiber, beads, and shells; purchase: the George H. and Elizabeth O. Davis Fund [F92-13]

A number of midwestern museums, finding themselves, like the Nelson-Atkins, passed over by bicoastal blockbusters, decided to pool their collections of Impressionist paintings and the talents of their staffs to create their own blockbuster. The result was "Impressionism: Selections from Five American Museums," which was drawn from the St. Louis Art Museum, the Toledo Museum of Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Carnegie Museum of Art, and the Nelson-Atkins. The Kansas City venue was April - June 1990 and attendance was 124,000. Ford Motor Company was a generous sponsor of both the exhibition and related programs, with an additional grant from the Courtney S. Turner Charitable Trust.

A number of other outstanding exhibitions occurred at the Nelson-Atkins during this period, including "Art by Chance: Fortuitous Impressions," which investigated the random and accidental aspects of art in all media, especially photography; "The Human Figure in Early Greek Art"; "Yani: The Brush of Innocence," the paintings of a child prodigy; and "Treasures of the Jewish Museum." In the fall of 1991 "Intelligence of Forms: An Artist Collects African Art" gave the Museum the opportunity to work with leaders of the African-American community to organize educational and community programs, with Pat Jordan as chair of the advisory committee. The Kansas City Power & Light Company became a full partner with the Museum in sponsoring both the exhibition and programs. The Museum was also resourceful in using its own collections to mount exhibitions such as "American Drawings and Watercolors" whose catalogue was made possible in part by Mrs. Herbert O. Peet, an artist herself and a long-time friend of the American department.

Certainly the Museum's largest undertaking in the field of exhibitions was the organization of

"The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang," a re-evaluation of the paintings and calligraphy of the great seventeenth-century master. Organized by Wai-kam Ho, with a tong of researchers, it had the cooperation of the Palace Museum in Beijing and the Shanghai Museum, which were the principal lenders. Its venue in Kansas City from April to June 1992 was preceded by a scholarly symposium organized by Wai-ching Ho and funded by the B.Y. Lam Foundation. The exhibition, which was underwritten in part by a grant of \$350,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities, travelled to the Los Angeles County Museum and the Metropolitan Museum.



Adele and Donald Hall, at the preview of modern sculpture acquired by the Hall Family Foundation, June 1991.

The prize-winning, two-volume catalogue received generous support from Paul B. Day Jr. and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.

If the Tung Ch'i-ch'ang show was the climax of the Museum's exhibition programs, certainly the acquisitions of modern sculpture by the Hall Family Foundation gave the most significant new dimension to the Museum's collections. This initiative started in December 1986 with the Foundation's purchase of fifty-eight works by Henry Moore from the collector George J. Ablah, of Wichita. The

works were placed on long-term loan to the Museum and were divided into two groups. Maquettes and small sculptures were installed in an exhibition-study



Henry Moore

Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 9, 1968

Bronze; length: 96 inches; the Patsy and Raymond Nasher Collection at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, lent by the Hall Family Foundation [20-1991]

center on the balcony of Rozzelle Court. A collaboration among the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, the Hall Family Foundations, and the Museum led to the creation of the Henry Moore Sculpture Garden, designed by Daniel Urban Kiley and Jaquelin T. Robertson, which was dedicated in June 1989. The eleven monumental sculptures, together with the one Moore sculpture already in the Museum's collection, and Moore's *Sheep Piece*, were installed on the grounds of the Museum.¹⁰ The Henry Moore Study Center and Garden have "in a single stroke changed the nature of the Museum" by bringing "this resource to our community," Marc Wilson wrote.¹¹

In the belief that the field of sculpture offered the Museum the best opportunity to acquire great works of twentieth-century art, the Hall Family Foundation acquired, in the spring of 1991, five masterpieces from the Patsy and Raymond Nasher Collection, in Dallas. They included Constantin Brancusi, *Portrait of Nancy Cunard (Sophisticated Young Lady)*, sculpted in walnut in the period 1925-1927; the monumental bronze, Max Ernst, *Capricorn*; Alberto Giacometti, *The Chariot*; Henry Moore, *Two Piece Reclining Figure No. 9*; and Carl Andre, *Aluminum and Magnesium Plain*. Placed on long-term loan to the Museum, three of the pieces have been installed in the twentieth-century galleries; the Ernst is in Kirkwood Hall; and the Moore has been placed in the Henry Moore Sculpture Garden.

Drawing on the expertise of Martin Friedman, former director of the Walker Art Center, and on research by Deborah Scott and the staff of the twentieth-century department, the Hall Family Foundation made a further commitment to modern sculpture in September 1992. This third group of Hall acquisitions represented the formal beginnings of an initiative to build one of the world's finest collections of modern sculpture. These sculptures were Alexander Calder, *Untitled*, an abstract work of 1937; a bronze by Joel Shapiro, *Untitled*; Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Saxophone, Scale B*; and two works by Isamu Noguchi, *Night Land* and *Six-Foot Energy Void*, the latter acquired from the Noguchi Foundation. All of these works were also placed on long-term loan.

Meanwhile, the Museum's activities had expanded in a number of significant areas. The merger of the Friends of Art with the Museum, which was accomplished in April 1986 with some regret, but also much understanding and goodwill, gave the Museum the opportunity to expand its



Alexander Calder
Untitled, 1937

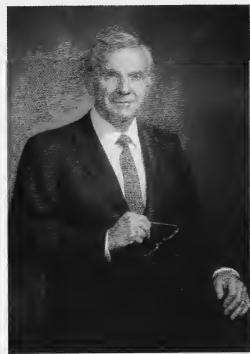
Painted metal and wood standing mobile; 61 x 36 x 16 inches; on long-term loan from the Hall Family Foundation [50-1992/2]

membership. The number of Friends of Art members grew from about 6,200 in 1986 to 12,500 by 1991. At the same time the Society of Fellows also added a significant number of new members; the total exceeded 900 by the same date. Under the leadership of Henry W. Bloch the Museum had formed the Business Council in October 1985. Designed to serve the interests of the business community and to attract financial support, the Business Council soon had a roster of 145 members. These three membership organizations made a substantial contribution to the Museum's annual operations. The Volunteer Council was organized in 1989 to support the more than 650 members who serve the Museum in a variety of capacities.

Increased revenue from membership added to the Museum's resources that could be used to

strengthen a number of departments. One of these areas was conservation. Forrest Bailey, who came to the Museum in 1973 as chief conservator, was able to add specialists to his staff in painting, paper, and objects conservation. The rooftop conservation studio was extensively remodelled in 1988 to make room for new staff and long-needed equipment. These improvements not only encouraged ongoing treatment of the Museum's collections, but also allowed such special projects as the conservation of *Ra-wer* (38-11) by Kate Garland and a team of associates, and Scott Hefley's treatment of Agnolo Bronzino, *Portrait of a Young Man* (49-28) — the latter with assistance from the Getty conservation laboratory.

The Spencer Art Reference Library also benefited from new funds, which underwrote additions to staff and funds for book and serial acquisitions. Difficult issues involving recataloguing and



Henry W. Bloch,
founding chairman of the Business Council,
University Trustee. photograph by Bachrach

computerization were partially addressed as the collection grew to fifty thousand titles by the end of the 1980s. The formation of the Spencer Library Associates in 1988 gave the library effective advo-

cates. John A. Morgan was chairman of the Associates' committee, which included Mrs. Moulton Green Jr., Mrs. Morton I. Sosland, Nicholas S. Pickard, and Mrs. Ilus W. Davis, who organized programs that attracted a supportive membership and sought grants for cataloguing. The response from Boatmen's First National Bank, the Oppenstein Brothers Foundation, the Lester T. Sunderland Foundation, the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, and from individual board members was extremely gratifying. The advent of Susan Malkoff Moon in September 1992 as head librarian gave the library new energy and leadership. The slide library, capably managed by Janice McKenna, has also grown phenomenally over the last decade. In 1992 the Museum established an archives, with grants from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the National



Ross and Kathleen Taggart, Barbara Rahm, annual dinner of the Society of Fellows, October 1982.

Archives, and from the William T. Kemper Foundation at Commerce Bank. Chuck Hill, the archivist, is organizing the vast accumulation of more than seventy years of the Museum's records.

The last decade has seen substantial growth and change in the Education Department, directed since 1979 by Ann Brubaker. Adult programs, family days for children and adults, innovative museum-school programs, and credit courses and resource packets for teachers are some of the department's initiatives. The Creative Arts Center completely revised its curriculum for young children, with the assistance of Muriel Silberstein-Storfer of the Metropolitan Museum. The Museum is also deeply committed to Arts Partners, a major effort to offer comprehensive arts programs to four area school districts. These programs have received generous support from the corporate and foundation communities, including the Oppenstein Brothers Foundation, the Francis Families Foundation, and the Southwestern Bell Foundation. The Powell Family and Yellow Freight System Foundations created an endowment to support the department's staff and programs. The full-time staff of nine is assisted by 130 volunteer docents and 60 art educators who serve more than 100,000 children and adults each year. Ann Brubaker has made the department an important part of the educational fabric of Kansas City by her commitment to serve the needs of all communities.

During the last decade the Nelson-Atkins' leadership has remained strong, with few changes in senior staff. The Museum was unfortunately deprived of the counsel of Laurence Sickman, who died May 7, 1988, at the age of eighty-one.¹² New associate trustees joined the board, Charles A. Duboc, George E. Powell Jr., Mrs. R. Hugh Uhlmann, Mrs. Michael D. Fields, Robert H. West, Paul Copaken, Thornton

Cooke II, William H. Dunn, Ollie Gates, Harry C. McCray Jr., G. Kenneth Baum, Mrs. Louis L. Ward, and Mary Ann B. Hale. Two University Trustees retired full of years and honors: Menefee D. Blackwell left office in June 1991, after a term of thirty-four years. His successor, Henry W. Bloch, chairman and CEO of H & R Block Inc., had been an associate trustee and founding chairman of the Business Council. Herman R. Sutherland resigned in June 1993, after a term of twenty-three years, and was succeeded by Mrs. Morton I. Sosland. Estelle Sosland had been an associate trustee and a long-time volunteer, who had served the Museum in many capacities.

The three University Trustees — Donald Hall, Henry Bloch, and Estelle Sosland — and their associate trustee colleagues, together with Wilson and the Museum's staff, bring the Museum admirable strength, which will be needed to meet the challenges of the 1990s. Since Wilson's appointment in December 1982, the Museum has grown in every dimension. The annual budget has expanded from \$3.4 to \$10.6 million, more than a threefold increase. The number of full-time employees has gone from 101 to 159. The building is uncomfortably crowded; office space is at a premium; storage has spilled over into offsite caves and warehouses; no additional school tours can be accommodated; the library is obliged to shift books to compact storage; the choice of special exhibitions is restricted by the limited space of the loan galleries; and portions of the collections cannot be displayed.

Because of the tremendous growth in the Museum's services, the expectations of both staff and community have been raised, and the Museum is now requested to tackle many new projects. For example, there is an insistent demand for more educational programs, a richer exhibition schedule, and additional catalogues and publications. New audiences are asking for access to the Museum's programs

and collections. All these demands come at a time when attendance is flat and income is down. The number of visitors in 1983 was 310,000; in 1993 it was 311,000, with a peak of 438,000 in 1988. Both membership income and revenue from endowments have declined, so that the Museum has had substantial deficits in the last two fiscal years. The challenge will be to balance fiscal responsibility with the desire to offer additional programs.

Nonetheless, the sixtieth anniversary year is a time of celebration and optimism. The collections are being reinstalled and reinterpreted.¹³ The loan galleries, Rozelle Court restaurant, and the bookstore are crowded, and the extended hours on Friday evenings are attracting new audiences.¹⁴ The Trustees and staff, with assistance from members and volunteers, are undergoing the rigors of long-range planning as they seek to define new relationships with the community. The Museum is on the threshold of meeting its principal goal, as envisioned by Marc Wilson. "The purpose of the Museum is to effect change," he wrote. Such change comes from "the encounter between the individual and a work of art," which will "enrich his understanding of the human condition."¹⁵ If these encounters with art can be made meaningful to new audiences as well as old visitors, then the collections and programs of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art will perform an indispensable service for the community and will generously fulfill the high ideals and aspirations of its founders.

¹ William Rockhill Nelson Trust, trustees' minutes, December 1, 1981, NAMA Archives.

² James Forbes, "Developments," Summer 1984, p. 4.

³ Of the total of 1,373 gifts, eighty-eight percent came from members. Works of art or funds designated for art acquisition totalled \$24.6 million; funds earmarked for public service or capital improvements

totalled \$4.6 million; and \$28.9 million was unrestricted. The Trustees later directed that unrestricted gifts should be added to the endowment funds of the Nelson Gallery Foundation. Ninety percent of the total amount raised came in gifts which were \$100,000 or larger.

⁴ An additional multi-year gift of \$1 million from major foundations and corporations, matched by the National Arts Stabilization Fund, was awarded in 1986 for the purpose of strengthening the Museum's overall financial stability.

⁵ The Corot had belonged to Andrew W. Mellon and had hung in the living room of his house in Pittsburgh, along with a Cuyp landscape that is now in the National Gallery. Paul Mellon presented the picture to his wife's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Conover. It was inherited by another daughter, Catherine Conover Bunting, whose husband gave it to the Nelson-Atkins. Paul Mellon, *Reflections in a Silver Spoon* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), p. 67.

⁶ John Russell, writing in the *New York Times* for November 22, 1987, deplored the effect of astronomical art prices on museums' collections. However, he added, "Reason and stability can be found in museum reports from all over," and cited *The Bountiful Decade*. "Is this the portrait of a decade in which museums are in decline," when the Nelson-Atkins has acquired "the glorious portrait by Mme. Vigée Le Brun..., examples of Oriental art that continue the great tradition established...by Laurence Sickman,...and the famous portrait of Monsignor Turner by Thomas Eakins!" See also Roger B. Ward, "Paintings Recently Acquired by the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City," *Burlington Magazine*, February 1991, pp. 153-160.

⁷ Ellen R. Goheen, *The Collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988). The publication was assisted by a grant from the Jacob L. and Ella C. Loose Foundation.

⁸ Roger Ward and Patricia J. Fidler, eds., *The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collection* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1993). A gift

from Mrs. Albert L. Gustin III assisted with its publication. It succeeds the fifth edition, edited by Ross E. Taggart and George L. McKenna, which was published in 1973 on the fortieth anniversary. Earlier editions of the Handbook appeared in 1933, 1941, 1949, and 1959.

⁹ The review of the exhibition by Donald Hoffman, a self-proclaimed Benton detractor, was balanced by another essay by Kyle MacMillan, *Kansas City Star*, April 16, 1989. See also *Time*, May 1, 1989; *Newsweek*, May 15, 1989; *Smithsonian*, April 1989; *New York Times*, April 13, 1989 and November 17, 1989; and *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 1989.

¹⁰ N. Clyde Degginger left the city of Kansas City, Missouri, a legacy for the purchase of a piece of sculpture. After many delays the city acquired *Sheep Piece*, and Henry Moore came to Kansas City in 1976 to select the site for the sculpture on the Museum's lawn.

¹¹ Annual Report to the Trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, 1988-1989, p. xx, NAMA Archives.

¹² *Kansas City Star*, May 8, 1988 and May 29, 1988; *New York Times*, May 11, 1988; *Times* (London), May 13, 1988; and *Art in America*, July 1988, p. 156.

¹³ Reinstallation of the first floor of the west wing has brought about a complete reordering of the collections by date and civilization, from ancient art through eighteenth-century sculpture. Over 4,200 members of the Friends of Art contributed a total of \$785,000 to the reinstallation project. For the first time the Museum's holdings in European sculpture are adequately displayed, and with the assistance of the Courtney S. Turner Trust a new treasury is being created for the display of the Keir Collection of medieval enamels, which are on long-term loan to the Museum.

¹⁴ Sprint Corporation generously sponsored the extended hours on Friday evenings.

¹⁵ Marc F. Wilson memorandum, August 1993, NAMA Archives.



Thomas Wight (1874-1949)
Photograph courtesy of Missouri Valley Special Collections,
Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri

THE PARTHENON MEETS THE PLAINS

Designing the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1911-1944

For a city mired in the Great Depression, December 11, 1933 rose with an appropriate combination of gray skies and cold temperatures. The day, though, promised some relief from the gloomy weather and economic worry: at long last, Kansas City's new "temple to art" was set to open. Despite the conditions, thousands of shivering visitors pushed through the building, lured by its novelty, its artistic treasures, and especially the chance to see the legendary painting *Whistler's Mother*.¹ For the 4:00 p.m. dedication, some one thousand visitors crowded into Atkins Auditorium, many spilling out onto the grand Atkins staircase.² Those within earshot heard words of thanks, praise, and idealism from an assorted group of dignitaries.

Among the speakers was J.C. Nichols, local real estate genius and trustee of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust. In his brief speech, Nichols dedicated the Trust-funded artworks at the core of Kansas City's new collection. At the same time, he echoed the dreams and ideals symbolized by the monumental building. To Nichols, the building and its collections represented a shining step forward for Kansas City; the grimy frontier town had given way to a cultured metropolis. But the city's advance, he suggested, was not over. Inspired by the building and its contents, Nichols believed the citizens of Kansas City would continue their inexorable march forward. As he put it, "The generations just behind conquered

a wilderness of prairie and of plain. Now art comes. May our people assert themselves from this day forward in higher aspirations, loftier ideals and nobler conceptions of the imperishable values of life."³

Nichols seemed to be sincere. He and his fellow trustees believed from the outset that the museum should simultaneously uplift and enlighten Kansas Citians. They also wished for a grand memorial to Mary Atkins, William Rockhill Nelson, and the Nelson family. Thomas Wight, the trustees' chosen architect, transformed their ideals into reality by designing a midwestern Parthenon. Part temple to art and part mausoleum, Wight's structure utilized a monumental classicism appropriate for both functions. The same loose classicism unified his decorative scheme which began with ancient Greece, traversed the Renaissance, and ended with the mythology of the American West. From the banalities of plumbing to grand schemes for a reflecting lake, the process of design and construction undertaken by Wight and his bosses was filled with optimism, enthusiasm, and, at times, anxiety and disgust. Their efforts managed to transcend the pessimism of the Great Depression and create a symbol of Kansas City's cultural, aesthetic, and architectural aspirations.

Though the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art was not commissioned until 1927, Kansas City had contemplated the construction of an art museum since the death of Mary Atkins in October 1911.

The seemingly stern, reclusive Atkins surprised Kansas Citizens by leaving some \$300,000 of her sizable estate to construct a public art museum.⁴ Bolstered by this sudden infusion of money, eager museum supporters began dreaming up designs for the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts within days of the widow's death. The most creative proposed that the Atkins Museum be included in a twenty-story "municipal skyscraper" to be built downtown.⁵

Building the museum in Penn Valley Park seemed a more practical solution; by 1912, the park had become the favored site. Located across from Union Station, which opened in 1914, the Atkins Museum would have further enhanced the city's new civic center. The architect of Union Station, Jarvis Hunt (1859-1941), had even agreed to make initial sketches for the museum.⁶

Enthusiasm for a Penn Valley site continued into 1913 when local architect Ben J. Lubschetz suggested siting the museum opposite Union Station with its facade facing downtown.⁷ As envisioned by Lubschetz, the conservative, classically-inspired structure would consist of two flat-roofed end wings joined by colonnades to a central block. Continuing the classical theme, the central block was to be fronted by a pedimented portico. Though never realized, Lubschetz's proposal later influenced the design of the Nelson-Atkins.

Even George Kessler (1862-1923), the highly regarded landscape architect behind Kansas City's boulevard system, became involved in the planning for the Atkins Museum; his designs for Penn Valley Park were illustrated in the *Kansas City Post* in 1919.⁸ Instead of Lubschetz's suggestion that the Atkins Museum face Union Station, Kessler sited Kansas City's proposed World War I memorial (built between 1923 and 1926 as the Liberty Memorial) across from the station. To the south of the memori-

al, Kessler specified a long mall flanked by colonnades. He placed the Atkins Museum at the end of the mall.

The Atkins trustees, after spending several years converting the estate from real estate into more liquid investments, finally took a formal step towards building when, in 1920, they named Thomas and William Wight as architects.⁹ Delays continued, however, until 1925 when the *Kansas City Star* reported that the Atkins trustees had \$700,000 available to build the museum and were planning on using the site south of the Liberty Memorial.¹⁰ The trustees formally confirmed this plan in February 1927.¹¹

Despite their proclamation that they would build in Penn Valley Park, the Atkins trustees were soon considering a joint venture with the trustees of the various Nelson family estates. The deaths of Ida Nelson, wife of William Rockhill Nelson, and Laura Nelson Kirkwood, his daughter, created a substantial pool of money devoted to building the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art; by late 1930 the Laura Kirkwood and Ida Nelson trusts together possessed over \$2.1 million for museum construction.¹² Laura's death also released the millions left by her father for the establishment of a public art collection. Meanwhile, the Atkins trustees, despite prudent investment (by late 1930, the trust could contribute \$675,000 to museum construction) managed a much smaller fund. Aware that the Atkins trust could hardly fund a decent building, let alone pay for land and an art collection, their plans required support from the city or other sources.¹³ Given their funding situation, the death of Laura Kirkwood must have made the idea of a joint museum seem a real, and perhaps necessary, possibility for the Atkins trustees.

The prospect of a joint museum became more likely late in 1926 when Irwin Kirkwood, Laura's hus-

band, announced that he would give up his lifetime occupancy rights to Oak Hall, the Nelson family home.¹⁴ By the terms of Laura Kirkwood's will, his decision would result in the demolition of Oak Hall and the sale of its sizable lot. The funds so raised would go to Laura's estate which was essentially pledged to the construction of an art gallery named after her father. Rather than sell the lot to a private party, however, Irwin offered to deed the land to the city as a site for the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art. The city accepted, virtually guaranteeing that Kansas City would have an art museum.

By 1927, the Atkins trustees were faced with a potential competitor who possessed both the funds and the site necessary for a sizeable museum. Not surprisingly, discussions on a collaboration soon followed Kirkwood's announcement.¹⁵ The final decision to work jointly was publicly recognized on July 2, 1927 when the Atkins and Nelson family trustees announced the selection of Wight and Wight as their architects.¹⁶ Finally, sixteen years after the death of Mary Atkins and twelve years after the death of William Rockhill Nelson, Kansas City could look forward to an art museum. The decision to collaborate put an end to a Penn Valley site for the Atkins Museum of Fine Arts. Earlier suggestions that the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art be built in Penn Valley Park (in a separate building from the Atkins Museum) were also set aside.¹⁷ The various designs contributed by Lubsch, Kessler, and others, though, were not completely wasted. They helped establish a precedent for Wight and Wight: that the future Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art be a formal, classically-inspired building sited so as to emphasize its formality and grandeur. Thomas Wight began designing just such a structure in the summer of 1927.

Wight and Wight's job had now expanded

from a vague commission for a small art museum into a project of national significance: design a preeminent art museum that would simultaneously fulfill the hopes and dreams of its promoters, incorporate the latest technical innovations, and serve as a dignified memorial to its benefactors. Though not a prominent national firm, Wight and Wight was led by a competent pair of partners in the brothers Thomas (1874-1949) and William Wight (1882-1947). Thomas (Frontispiece), the senior of the two, took charge of the designs for the Nelson-Atkins. Like many architects of their day, the two received their training not at college, but through apprenticeships.¹⁸ Thomas received his training between 1891 and 1904 in the New York and Boston offices of McKim, Mead and White, then the most well-known architectural firm in the country. Between his experience there and a year spent studying in Italy and Greece, Thomas was exposed almost exclusively to classically-inspired design; this conservative classicism would serve him well for much of his career and especially for the Nelson-Atkins project. William, who played a minor role in the Nelson-Atkins's designs, also apprenticed with McKim, Mead and White. The Wight and Wight partnership was initiated in Kansas City in 1911 after Edward T. Wilder retired, ending his seven-year partnership with Thomas Wight. The brothers soon became one of the city's leading architectural firms, making them a logical choice for the museum project.

Based on the brothers' earlier work in Kansas City, the trustees could expect a tasteful, conservative classicism. Most prominent among their work prior to the Nelson-Atkins was the First National Bank building (designed by Thomas Wight during his partnership with Wilder; built 1904-1906; located at 14 West 10th Street) and the Kansas City Life Insurance Company building (built 1924; located at

3520 Broadway).¹⁹ Both structures are symmetrical, classical buildings with massive columns, heavy entablatures, and flat roofs.

The same features figured into Wight's first exterior designs for the Nelson-Atkins. Though detailed plans were not ordered until the spring of 1928, Wight

intact from conception through completion.

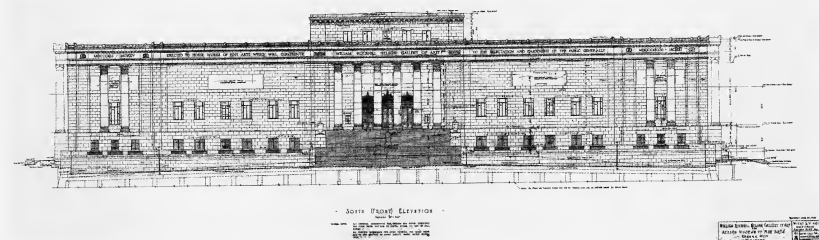
True to conservative tastes in museum design, Wight envisioned a massive, classically-derived building. He specified a symmetrical, rectangular structure composed of three main blocks evenly spaced along the length of the rectangle. Narrow, corridor-like units



1. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
Presentation Drawing: **South Facade**, March 22, 1929
Graphite on illustration board; 15-5/8 x 35-15/16 in.; Gift of Mrs. Marjorie Tarbell Brenari,
Miss Shirley Tarbell, and Mrs. Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer, R81-4/7

developed preliminary designs during the summer of 1927; he claimed to have taken along his drafting equipment while vacationing in his native Nova Scotia.²⁰ Wight's initial design for the south facade was published in June, 1928 in the *Kansas City Star*.²¹ The close similarities between this drawing, a surviving presentation drawing dated March 22, 1929 (Figure 1), and the final working drawing for the south facade (Figure 2) show that Wight's original facade design remained largely

would join the blocks to form the long sides of the rectangle. On the exterior, monumental, classically-derived ornament would be the dominant theme. Towering Ionic columns along the fronts of the three main blocks were to be the most prominent feature. Supporting motifs included the handsomely detailed string of anthemion (stylized leaves and flowers) lining the cornice and wrapping around the bases and tops of the columns.



2. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
Working Drawing: **South (Front) Elevation**, April 10, 1929
Ink on linen; 23-1/2 x 63-3/4 in.; NAMA Archives

Wight's time at McKim, Mead and White provided him with his classical vocabulary. During his years with the firm in the 1890s, they were leaders in establishing the so-called Beaux-Arts style in the United States. Named after the influential *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, Beaux-Arts buildings were usually monumental public buildings with formal exteriors inspired by Greek, Roman, and Italian Renaissance architecture. McKim, Mead and White's designs, unlike later American Beaux-Arts buildings, emphasized the rational, mathematical quality of classical design over the period's romantic taste for elaborate ornamentation.

Thomas Wight thus learned the rational classicism of the early Beaux-Arts style. His exterior design for the Nelson-Atkins reflects this training. Rather than an ornate architectural confection, his building seems to have more in common with a Greek temple than with a more elaborate Renaissance villa; like a Greek temple, Wight's design found beauty in the sparse use of classical features and the emotional power of its immense size.

Wight's restrained approach was validated by earlier Greek-inspired museums. In particular, his design was indebted to the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York (Edward B. Green, architect; opened 1905) and the Cleveland Museum of Art (Hubbell and Benes, architects; opened 1916). These restrained structures feature similar rectangular plans as well as prominent use of the Ionic order; though somewhat more elaborate, the Cleveland Museum in particular bears a striking resemblance to Wight's exterior designs (Figure 3).²² Earlier proposals for the Atkins Museum further encouraged a Greek-inspired design. Ben Lubsch's 1913 sketch in the *Star* showed a temple-like building quite similar to the Albright Art Gallery. The simplified, Grecian style of the Albright had also been suggest-

ed as a model for the Atkins Museum by Samuel Moore, president of the Kansas City Fine Arts Institute.²³

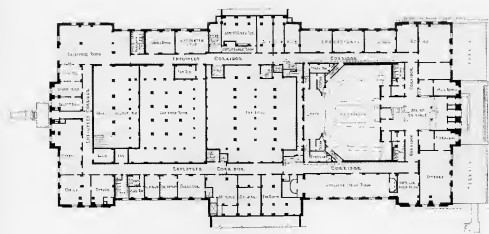
Wight's sparse design also owed something to the principles of German Modernism and the French Art Moderne style, then both recent arrivals to the world of design. Though ideological opposites, both movements simplified the aesthetics of architecture and the decorative arts. Wight, though conservative, was not untouched by these movements. He was unwilling, however, to give himself over to new and suspiciously unproven ways of designing. As he put it, "We are building the museum on classic principles because they have been proved by the centuries. A distinctly American principle appropriate



3. South facade view of the newly completed Cleveland Museum of Art (Architects: Benjamin Hubbell and W. Dominick Benes), Summer 1916
Photograph courtesy of The Cleveland Museum of Art

for such a building may be developed, but, so far, everything of that kind is experimental. One doesn't experiment with 2-1/2 million dollars."²⁴

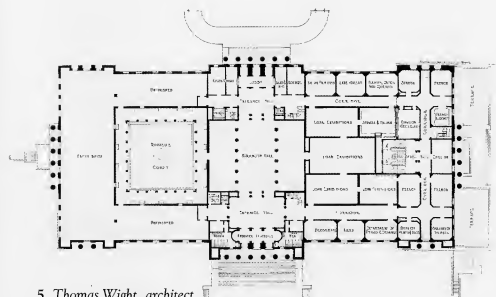
Apart from being financially responsible, Wight's choice of "classic principles" suited the building's function as both a temple to culture and a memorial to its benefactors.²⁵ For a temple to culture, classical styles were an obvious choice. Greece and Rome were regarded as the cradles of Western civilization. An art museum dedicated to preserving the arts of Western civilization should therefore acknowledge this debt. An art museum also functioned something like a classical temple: both con-



4. Thomas Wight, architect

Drawing: **Ground Floor Plan**, December 5, 1933

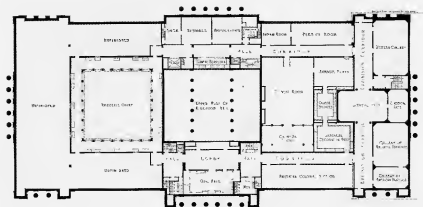
Ink on linen; 23-1/2 x 37 in.; NAMA Archives



5. Thomas Wight, architect

Drawing: **First Floor Plan**, December 5, 1933

Ink on linen; 23-1/2 x 35 in.; NAMA Archives



6. Thomas Wight, architect

Drawing: **Second Floor Plan**, December 5, 1933

Ink on linen; 23-1/2 x 36-1/4 in.; NAMA Archives

tained objects held in great reverence, whether the statue of a deity or the religious paintings of the Italian Renaissance.²⁶ In addition, a temple-like structure served the city's cultural aspirations. Like the Parthenon, Kansas City's temple on the hill would remind citizens to better themselves by "worshipping" at the altar of art.

So too, temple architecture fit the building's memorial function. For one, Wight's classical temple enthroned Mary Atkins, William Rockhill Nelson, Ida Nelson, Laura Nelson Kirkwood, and Irwin Kirkwood as cultural deities. Temple architecture also offered the appropriate level of decorum for a memorial; after all, most mausoleums of the day resembled small classical temples. By designing such a stern facade, however, Wight may have been too conscious of graveyard architecture. As one critic commented, "...somehow the whole caboodle, sitting on its hill above a city which is apathetic about it, reminds me of an incredibly handsome tomb. It's like one of those vaults filled with statuettes in which ancient Chinese kings began their journeys to the other world."²⁷

Like his conservative exterior designs, Wight's interiors followed established precedent for some features (Figures 4-6). The building's large central hall, for example, was a feature it shared with many other American museums built during the early twentieth century.²⁸ These halls inculcated an immediate sense of awe and respect that was considered appropriate for viewing art. At first named Tapestry Hall, the hall at the Nelson-Atkins became officially known as Kirkwood Hall prior to the opening of the museum.

Wight also tried to include the latest thinking in interior planning. To house the art, he designed long corridors running along the length of the building. The various galleries opened off of these hall-

ways, creating a series of individual, cell-like rooms for viewing art. By contrast, earlier buildings like the Cleveland Museum of Art typically displayed art in a series of wide, interconnected halls that confronted visitors with art-filled gallery after art-filled gallery. Critics claimed that this arrangement induced visual fatigue. The hall and cell scheme used by Wight was thought to be a more accommodating arrangement since it permitted visitors to choose among small groupings of art works.²⁹

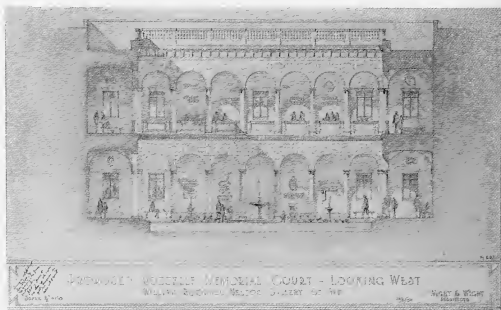
Fatigue was a prominent concern among museum designers and officials, including those responsible for the Nelson-Atkins.³⁰ Specifically known as “museum fatigue,” the syndrome was described by J.C. Nichols in an interview with the *Kansas City Star*:

It is a real and well-defined affliction that comes as a result of walking through art galleries and other kinds of museums. In cities of Europe and in New York, where they have large museums, people become worn out...their minds are bewildered and depressed. They go home, go to bed, and are sick for days. In designing this gallery, with its acres of space on four floors, its miles of corridors, its many rooms, filled with works of art, we had always in mind that unwelcome disease, “museum fatigue,” and everything here is planned to prevent it.³¹

The western courtyard, eventually known as Rozzelle Court, was the centerpiece of Wight’s fatigue-relieving arrangement. Wight’s presentation drawing (Figure 7) envisioned a sunny courtyard filled with fountains, plants, and wall-mounted sculpture.

Nichols, always the promoter, described the effect of the courtyard: “You come in here and drift through the rooms and hallways of this immense building, your mind worked up to a high pitch by one thrill after another, your muscles weary, and suddenly, through an open archway, you catch a glimpse of this green grass [in the courtyard]...Your mind is soothed.”³² Wight’s courtyard was not unique. Similar courts could be found in other museums of the day like the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Detroit Institute of Arts. There too, they were recognized for their restful qualities.³³ Wight also had experience with interior courtyards through his work on McKim, Mead and White’s Boston Public Library building (designed and built 1887-1895) which featured a substantial arcaded court.³⁴

Good lighting could also relieve museum fatigue. Prompted by recent innovations in electrical lighting, Wight specified electric lights for his up-to-date museum. Earlier museums had relied primarily on daylight admitted through clerestory windows, skylights, and other devices. While some believed that daylight provided the best environment for viewing



7. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
Presentation Drawing: **Proposed Rozzelle Memorial Court - Looking West**, December 6, 1930

Graphite and colored pencil on illustration board; 16 x 19-9/16 in.; Gift of Mrs. Marjorie Tarbell Brentari, Miss Shirley Tarbell, and Mrs. Margaret Tarbell Wehneyer, R81-4/1

art, it also created problems; cloudy days, glare, and degradation of the artwork were most frequently cited as drawbacks. Wight hoped to relieve these problems with electric lights. Despite his plans, the trustees considered both lighting methods. They eventually settled on electrical lighting in 1930.³⁵ Their decision was based primarily on cost: the skylights, louvers, and other equipment necessary for natural lighting would add nearly \$122,000 to the estimated construction costs.³⁶ Though praised as a miraculous feat of modern engineering, the museum's new lighting system did have problems. Among them was the cost of operation; a year after the museum opened, J.C. Nichols insisted that guards follow behind visitors, turning off the gallery lights.³⁷

When Thomas Wight finished his designs in 1929, he believed his exterior and interior plans met or exceeded those used for other museums of the day.³⁸ The trustees, however, were not so quick to accept his work. Their apparent lack of confidence in Wight arose from their own insecurities; they were businessmen, not museum professionals. Their inexperience made them extremely cautious and fearful that they would make serious mistakes. Thus throughout the design process, they valued the opinions of museum directors and curators more than the proposals made by Wight; after all, he had never designed a museum either.

The most cautious and vocal trustee was Fred C. Vincent, one of the trustees of the Laura Nelson Kirkwood estate. Early on, Vincent seemed to have become the *de facto* overseer of the design of the building. His role was made official in the summer of 1930 when he became chairman of the building committee.³⁹ In this capacity, his concern with making mistakes became obsessive, driving him to take issue with much of Wight's work. Even before

becoming official chairman, Vincent resisted approving Wight's plans without having them reviewed by an outside consultant. The weight of responsibility drove his resistance: "This building, 370 feet long on the top of the hill, seems to me a great responsibility, and if there is any one thing that isn't quite harmonious, it seems to me that it will assume tremendous proportions."⁴⁰ In the same letter, he recorded Wight's objections to seeking an outside judge: "Mr. Wight is of course opposed to this, as he believes his plans are the best that anybody could do, and naturally doesn't want some architect to come in and revamp his plans simply for the prestige..."⁴¹

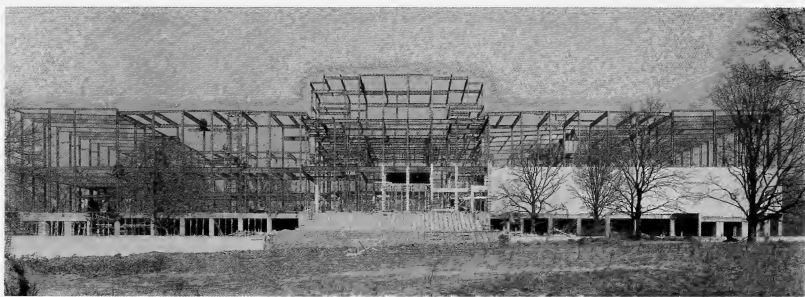
Vincent's concerns, shared by other trustees, led to formal and informal consultations with a string of museum professionals and architects. Edward Robinson, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was among the first asked to serve as a consultant.⁴² When he declined, several others were approached including William Mitchell Kendall, a partner in the firm of McKim, Mead and White.⁴³ Though Kendall did suggest some modifications, Vincent (and probably others) remained skeptical of Wight's plans. Vincent wrote, "will we ever be quite sure that we have made all of the changes necessary?...I do not urge that we employ a consulting architect, but I am much less confident as to the finality of these plans than I was some time ago when Mr. Wight insisted that they were absolutely all right."⁴⁴

Vincent was especially concerned with Wight's interior plans and pushed for further review. Finally, late in 1929, Frederic A. Whiting, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, agreed to serve as a consultant. He was charged with reviewing the plans for the interior.⁴⁵ Over the next four months, Whiting studied Wight's plans, discussed them with the architect, and issued a series of detailed sugges-

tions for fine-tuning the interior plans; taking his advice on everything from toilets to doorways to coat rooms, the trustees incorporated many of Whiting's suggestions.⁴⁶ Some of his recommendations, however, were ignored. Whiting, for example, advised caution in planning for natural lighting. He seemed particularly concerned that a blimp might come crashing through the skylights.⁴⁷

By March 1930, Whiting had completed his review and the final plans were approved.⁴⁸ The trustees dispensed with the usual competitive bid-

uncommon in Kansas City during the early years of the Great Depression. By late September 1930, excavation was complete, concrete forms were in place for the piers and foundation, and cement pouring had begun.⁵¹ A minor crisis occurred in early December with the approach of a strong, stormy cold front. To avoid cold-induced damage to the wet concrete, workers were forced to hastily pour the first floor before temperatures reached the danger point. The harried workers managed to pour an incredible 600 cubic yards of concrete in six and one-half hours.⁵²



8. Completed steel frame, January 6, 1931

Photograph copyright Wilborn and Associates

ding and quickly named John C. Long as contractor. Long proposed a fixed \$96,000 fee plus the actual costs of construction.⁴⁹ In November 1931, he estimated the latter at \$3,012,960, depending on landscaping features and other options under consideration.⁵⁰

Groundbreaking was finally held on July 16, 1930, nineteen years after the death of Mary Atkins and fifteen years after the death of William Rockhill Nelson. It would be another three years, however, before the building would finally open. The details of construction were covered with regularity in local newspapers; construction projects of its size were

Early in 1931, the massive steel skeleton for the museum was completed; for the first time, Kansas Citians had a true sense of the structure's immense scale (Figure 8).⁵³ Next came the stone exterior casing. Irwin Kirkwood had supposedly insisted that Indiana limestone be used; Wight obliged, selecting the hardest variety then available.⁵⁴ As the stonework got underway, cornerstone ceremonies were held. The Atkins wing ceremony took place on April 5, 1931, with the Nelson ceremony almost one month later on May 3.⁵⁵ Construction continued through 1931 and into 1932. By March 1932, Fred Vincent was able to tell John Wilson that Long

was “bringing his work through to a conclusion” on the exterior.⁵⁶ Work on the interior, however, would continue for another year and a half as galleries were finished, the lighting system was installed, and other details were attended to.



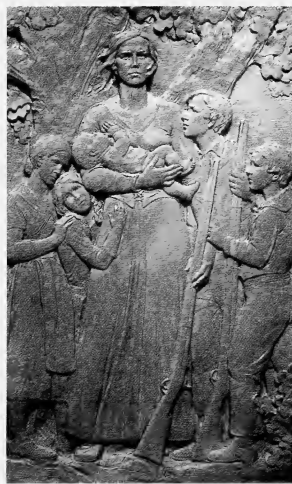
9. Charles Keck, sculptor
Maquette: *Arrival of Hernando De Soto*, c. 1930
Modelling clay; original dimensions unknown; NAMA Archives photograph

From a distance, the new museum must have seemed grand and imposing, though rather bland. But in making the long walk up the south lawn or the shorter trek to the north entrance, one would begin to recognize a rich variety of decorative details. Decoration formed an important part of Wight's aesthetic and symbolic scheme. Unlike the grand scale of the building, its ornamentation was more intimate; it invited visitors to contemplate the decorative treasures found on doors, walls, and ceilings. Wight's decoration was not merely frivolous confection. Rather, it was intended to intensify the building's symbolic power. Within one structure, Wight told the story of humankind's “progress” from ancient Greece to the settlement of the American Midwest.

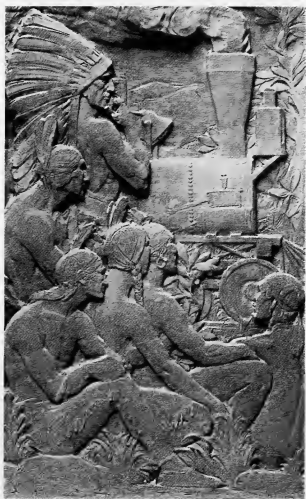
Certainly the most dramatic parts of Wight's designs were the exterior sculpture panels on the east, west, and south facades. His specifications called for panels depicting “historical events pertaining to this vicinity” to be “executed by a sculptor of national reputation.”⁵⁷ The sculptor chosen for the

job, Charles Keck (1875-1951), possessed both a national reputation as a sculptor as well as previous experience working with Thomas Wight. Keck, a student of Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907), built his career on commissions for public sculpture.⁵⁸ He had previously worked with Thomas Wight in 1917, creating a pair of lions to flank the Swope Memorial designed by Wight for Kansas City's Swope Park. Keck's work combined a conservative, realistic aesthetic with a tendency to inflate his subjects to mythical proportions. He brought the same qualities to his work for the Nelson-Atkins: his subjects and sculptural style, drawn from classical traditions, added a mythological element to Wight's Grecian temple.

Keck's panels begin on the east facade, travel across the south, and conclude on the west side of the building. Their story of midwestern settlement is a selective one, mixing historical fact with scenes



10. Charles Keck, sculptor
Maquette: *Pioneer Mother*, c. 1930
Modelling clay; original dimensions unknown; NAMA Archives photograph



11. Charles Keck, sculptor
Maquette: *Native Americans Observing the Arrival of the Railroad*, c. 1930
Modelling clay; original dimensions unknown; NAMA Archives photograph

drawn from Keck's own imagination (Appendix 1). The tale begins with the arrival of Hernando De Soto in the region in the early 1540s (Figure 9). Throughout the narrative, though, Keck also included scenes without such a precise grounding in historical reality; romantic images of the Pioneer Mother and Native Americans observing the arrival of a steam locomotive are only loosely based in fact (Figures 10-11).

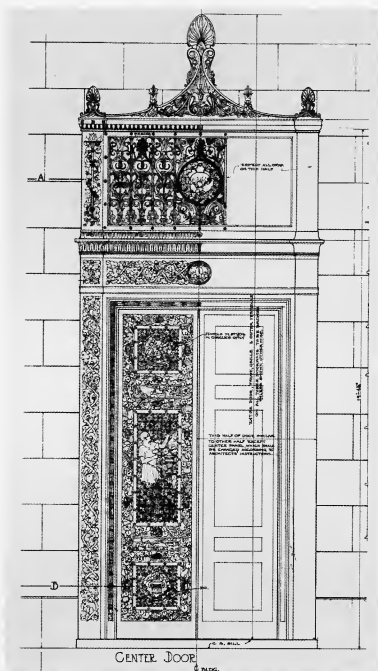
Keck's version of events, acted out by heroic

figures, managed to transform history into myth. Unifying the whole series of panels is the myth of manifest destiny. Keck presents a tale of inevitable progress where settlers are destined to civilize the West. Nowhere is this more clear than in the main panel located above the south doors (Figure 12). Here settlers are surrounded on both sides by attacking Indians. They are sustained, however, by the allegorical figure of Fortitude who spreads her arms to protect them (looking much like the image of Christ found in the tympana of many Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals); the victory of "civilization" over "savagery," suggests Keck, was preordained. The panels that follow affirm the continued march of progress.

Keck's panels were clearly derived from the architectural sculptures found on the temples of ancient Greece. Their heroic scale and mythological tone seem especially indebted to the metope and frieze sculptures of the Parthenon (built in Athens between 447 and 438 B.C.).⁵⁹ Like the Parthenon frieze which shows a religious procession in honor of Athena, Keck's frieze traces the procession of mid-western history. And where the Parthenon frieze inspired reverence for Athena, the Nelson-Atkins's panels reminded visitors of the historical and cultural progress that made their art museum a symbol of Kansas City's achievements. Even the image of Fortitude and the settlers on the central panel relates to the mixing of gods and mortals on the east side of the Parthenon frieze. Meanwhile, Keck's battle



12. Charles Keck, sculptor
Maquette: *Fortitude Protecting Settlers From Attack*, c. 1930
Modelling clay; original dimensions unknown; NAMA Archives photograph



13. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
Working drawing: **Bronze Ornamentation** (detail), April 10, 1929
Ink on linen; 24-1/2 x 63-3/4 in.; NAMA Archives

scenes, rearing horses, and other elements find foundation in the metopes of the Parthenon as well as in the sculptures of mythological battles found in other classical Greek structures.

Keck, while acknowledging his debt to ancient Greece, felt that American “temples” should express an American mythology. As he put it, “Why should we repeat constantly the history of Greece on our classic buildings when we have a country of our own with an interesting and picturesque history?”⁶⁰ His creative mix of classical tradition and frontier romance made a perfect frieze for the Nelson-Atkins. Not only did it

complement Wight’s classical architecture, but it made the building a symbol of the region’s historical progress.

Keck’s panels, the main element of Wight’s exterior decorative scheme, cost over \$103,000.⁶¹ The immense expense was due to the size of the panels—some 250 feet in total length—and the time-consuming process by which they were created.⁶² Keck first produced small clay maquettes followed by full-size models. From these, plaster models were made and shipped to Kansas City for Wight’s approval. Once approved, carving began on the blank stone panels that had already been built into the building’s walls. To reach the panels, scaffolding was erected and small sheds built to enclose the blank panels. In these sheds, the carvers, primarily Italian immigrants, worked under the direction of A.L. Lorenzani. After hauling a plaster model up to the shed, its general design was transferred to the blank stone panels using a pointing machine. This mechanical device allowed the carvers to establish the general outline of the carving and also to measure how deep major cuts needed to be. Once the design was transferred, carving took place using both pneumatic and hand tools.

Even more detailed than the sculptural panels were the building’s bronze doors on the south and east sides (Figure 13). Designed by both Wight and Keck, the doors drew on one of the great monuments in Western art—Lorenzo Ghiberti’s (1378-1455) “Gates of Paradise” doors (produced 1424-1452; located at the Baptistry of Florence). In place of Ghiberti’s Biblical scenes, Wight asked Keck to model scenes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s (1807-1882) epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*. First published in 1855, the poem remained a schoolroom classic into the twentieth century. Each pair of doors carries four scenes from the poem (Appendix

2). Like the building's sculpture panels, the *Hiawatha* scenes rely on the myths of frontier history. Longfellow, true to the tradition of romantic literature, transformed Native American life and legend into an epic of action and romance. His mythical approach, in turn, informed Keck's visual interpretation of the poem. Keck was especially drawn to action-filled passages that would make for dynamic reliefs. His presentation of these scenes was not unlike the illustrations found in pulp novels and popular magazines: according to Keck, all Native Americans were feathered headdresses and toted bows and arrows. In the context of the 1930s, this stereotyped image came from the same romantic mind-set that informed Keck's sculpture panels.

The southern set of bronze doors also played an important part in the building's role as a memorial to the Nelson family. Wight used secular symbols to honor the various family members. The grille over the center doorway, for example, contains an image of Aries, the zodiac symbol under which William Rockhill Nelson and his wife, Ida, were born. Above the other two doors are the symbols for Pisces and Capricorn, the respective birth signs of Laura Nelson Kirkwood and Irwin Kirkwood. These zodiac signs were repeated in stone panels on the north facade. Wight also remembered the family by using an oak leaf and acorn motif throughout the doors to symbolize Oak Hall, the Nelson family home.

Wight's taste for elaborate symbolism spilled over into other elements of the doors. The south doors featured low relief busts symbolizing the arts.⁶³ The center pair were further decorated with a female figure representing Inspiration and a male figure symbolizing Meditation. The center doors on the east side of the building pictured similar figures: a female symbolizing Simplicity and a male representing Truth. Presumably, these were all qualities to be

found inside the museum, whether in the artworks or in the study of art. Throughout the doors, Wight and Keck used the simplified aesthetic and symmetrical, geometric composition typical of the 1930s American Art Moderne style. Art Moderne details like the doors and the massive bronze urns flanking the south steps show that Wight, though conservative, was aware of emerging stylistic trends.

Like the building's sculpture panels, its interior decoration relied on images of humankind's cultural advancement. The murals lining the Atkins staircase in the building's east end are the most obvious examples. Wight copied his design for the staircase and its decoration from the main stairhall of McKim, Mead and White's Boston Public Library building; Wight had worked on this project while with the firm.⁶⁴ In both designs, a mural series occupies round-arched niches along both sides of a staircase. Similar to the exterior decoration, Wight required that the staircase's mural cycle trace the progress of human culture. The murals thus begin with a hairy caveman symbolic of primitive art and end with a scene titled *Renaissance Art*. Allegorical figures of Beauty, Truth, and the Genius of Art were also included.⁶⁵

The murals were painted by Andrew T. Schwartz (1867-1942), a New York artist who had studied at the American Academy in Rome and with painter Frank Duveneck (1848-1916) in Cincinnati. Schwartz had also previously executed murals for Wight and Wight's Kansas City Life Insurance Company building. Schwartz's murals for the Nelson-Atkins emulated the style and content of the Boston Public Library murals completed in 1896. The latter, painted by the French artist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898), used allegorical and historical figures to represent the Muses as well as poetry, philosophy, history, and the sci-

ences. Along with their grand historical allusions, both the Boston and the Nelson-Atkins murals share a realistic, Renaissance-inspired aesthetic. Schwartz, unfortunately, did not possess the compositional and technical skills of Puvis de Chavannes, perhaps the most accomplished painter in the academic, quasi-Renaissance style.



14. Daniel MacMorris, designer and painter
Study: *South Vestibule Lunette - The Applied Arts*, c. 1932
Graphite and watercolor on tracing paper; 6-13/16 x 13-1/8 in.; Purchase: Nelson Trust, 82-7/3

Much more impressive in their design and execution are the murals in the building's south vestibule and on the ceiling vaults of Rozzelle Court, all painted by Daniel MacMorris (1893-1981). At one time an illustrator for the *Kansas City Star*, MacMorris had studied with Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939) at the Art Institute of Chicago and spent time studying and working in Paris and New York.⁶⁶ He was first contracted to create murals for the ceiling of the south vestibule. These were to be based on decoration found in the sixteenth-century Villa Madama.⁶⁷ Designed by Raphael and completed after his death by Giulio Romano and Giovanni da Udine, the Villa Madama was built for Cardinal Giulio Medici in the hills outside of Rome beginning around 1517.⁶⁸ Wight was especially captivated by the ceiling decoration found in the Villa's open garden loggia. The Nelson-Atkins ceilings, like the

originals, incorporate small panels bordered by arabesques of flowers, foliage, and putti. The twelve panels in the museum's murals depict symbols of the zodiac.

To emulate the aged look of the Villa Madama ceilings, MacMorris used faded colors for his murals. Rather than working directly on the ceilings, he painted on canvas which was subsequently attached to the ceiling domes. For the three lunettes opposite the south doorway, he painted scenes symbolizing the fine arts, the applied arts, and architecture (Figure 14). Wight's choice of Renaissance imagery complemented his classical exterior as well as the massive Ionic and Corinthian columns used throughout the interior. Given the significance of the Renaissance to Western art, Renaissance-inspired decoration was appropriate for the ceilings of an art museum. Since the museum was to be a symbol of Kansas City's cultural birth, allusions to the Renaissance and its cultural achievements must also have seemed fitting.



15. Daniel MacMorris, designer and painter
Study: *Rozzelle Court Ceiling Vault*, 1938
Casein over graphite on canvas; 17-7/8 x 32-1/2 in.; Purchase: Nelson Trust, 82-7/4

Beginning in 1938, MacMorris again contributed his skills to the museum's decoration, this time in Rozzelle Court.⁶⁹ Here, too, he was to decorate vaulted ceilings in the Renaissance manner. In

Rozzelle Court, however, MacMorris painted directly onto the ceilings. This required a tedious transfer of his designs to the vaults. He first produced small-scale color designs (Figure 15). Then came full-size sketches which were perforated. The design was transferred to the ceiling by dusting powder through the perforations. Outlines were then painted and finally filled with faded colors. Done in casein (a milk-based binder) mixed with pigments, MacMorris produced some 500 individual designs for Rozzelle Court.⁷⁰ The project, originally intended to last 18 months, halted in 1939, prior to its completion. It was finally finished by MacMorris in 1974 after a hiatus of over thirty years.

Other elements of Wight's decorative scheme added to the building's imposing grandeur. Carved inscriptions running around the exterior cornice and on the north facade carry lofty quotations regarding the arts and their significance (Appendix 3). Inside, Wight made elegant use of an extensive variety of marbles ranging in color from jet black to pale yellow (Appendix 4). Though much of the marble was imported, the marble used in the south vestibule was quarried from the building site. The interior stonework also includes richly carved capitals. Illustrating the historical evolution of the Corinthian order, the capitals in Kirkwood Hall are particularly intricate examples of the stone carver's art (Figure 16). Between the luxurious marbles, the handsome ceilings, and the romantic sculpture panels, Wight's decorative scheme relieved the mausoleum-like severity of the building. At the same time, the decoration affirmed the museum's role as a symbol of the city's cultural ambitions.

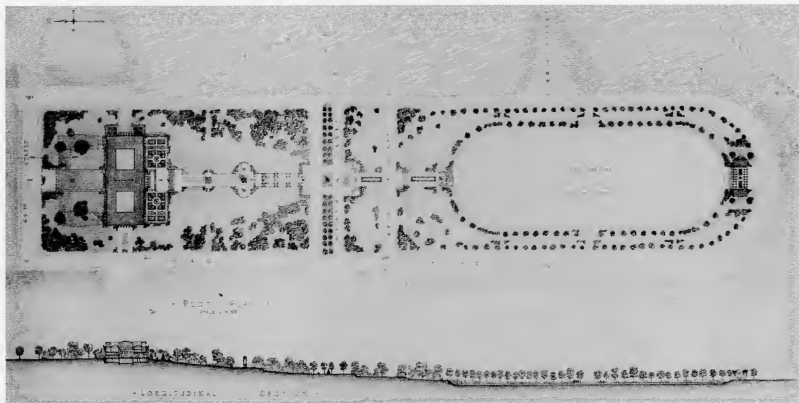
The imagery of progress carried by the walls, doors, and ceilings of Wight's building extended into his original plans for the grounds. His elaborate, formal scheme called for fountains, cascades, and a mas-



16. Stonecarvers carving capital for Kirkwood Hall column, c. 1931
Photograph courtesy of Mr. Bobby Hornaday

sive reflecting lake. Guided by the Beaux-Arts tradition and the tenets of the City Beautiful movement, Wight hoped to boost the visual power of the new museum. By doing so, the building and its grounds would impose aesthetic and physical order on the city's landscape; like its system of parks and boulevards, Kansas City's art museum would use a planned, rational landscape to combat the chaotic sprawl of the growing city.

As Figure 17 shows, Wight's original scheme was consistent with the classical formality of the building. According to this drawing, the rigid geometry of the building was to be echoed by the symmetrical parterres and fountains flanking the south entrance. A cascade punctuated by fountains would carry the symmetrical design down the south lawn. A massive 400-foot by 1130-foot reflecting lake south of Brush Creek Boulevard—Wight's aquatic *pièce de résistance*—dominates the entire plan. A later presentation drawing dated September 25, 1930

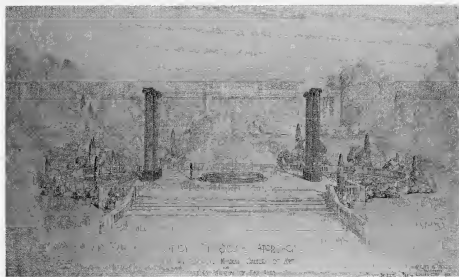


17. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
Presentation Drawing: **Suggestion for Development**, 1927
NAMA Archives photograph

offers a perspective view of Wight's south lawn (Figure 18). This view clearly illustrates the large oval terrace Wight sited halfway down the south slope. Apart from its fountain, this terrace also featured four Ionic columns. These would both echo the columns of the building and serve as memorials to William Rockhill Nelson, Ida Nelson, Laura Nelson Kirkwood, and Irwin Kirkwood. As a further monument to William Rockhill Nelson, Wight planned to place a full-length sculpture of Nelson on the museum's south steps.

Estimates for implementing Wight's design were enormous. The two fountains flanking the south facade were alone estimated at \$42,000; the smaller fountain and memorial columns pictured in Figure 18 would cost another \$35,000.⁷¹ These comparatively minor expenditures were in addition to the costs of the cascade, walkways, and other features. The cost of the south lawn, however, was a pittance compared to the 19.5 acre reflecting lake and park. In 1937, when the lake was finally given serious consideration, the design and construction

costs were estimated at \$498,000; this did not even include the cost of the colonnade proposed for the south end of the lake (Figure 19). Nor did it include the costs of acquiring the land. Though nearly all of the land was owned by the trustees of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust, Nelson's will did not allow for its use as a parkland; his trustees were required by his will to sell estate property at its fair market value. This would add another \$267,000 to the lake



18. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator
Presentation Drawing: **Study of South Approach**, September 25, 1930
Graphite and colored pencil on tracing vellum; 16-5/8 x 25-13/16 in.; Gift of Mrs. Marjorie Tarbell Brentari, Miss Shirley Tarbell, and Mrs. Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer, RSI 4/4

project, bringing its total to at least \$765,000, a monumental sum in 1937.⁷²

Grand and expensive landscape schemes like Wight's were typical of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century City Beautiful movement.⁷³ This movement, promoted by designers, citizens, and some politicians, was dedicated to improving city design and planning. Repulsed by the chaotic, grimy landscape of America's growing cities, City Beautiful advocates called for the creation of parks, boulevards, civic centers, and other amenities that would provide green space and impose order on the city landscape. Some City Beautiful projects, like Kansas City's winding boulevard system, took a naturalistic approach to design. Others, like Wight's museum project, matched monumental buildings with monumental, formal landscapes. Washington, D.C., offered the preeminent example of the monumental approach.

J.C. Nichols, appointed to the National Capitol Park and Planning Commission in 1926, was very familiar with the Washington model. It was his

belief that the museum grounds, and especially the lake, would compare favorably to the reflecting pools and formal architecture found at the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument.⁷⁴ Nichols and others also hoped that the museum and its grounds would become the anchor of a new civic center which would include a university (at first the University of Kansas City, now the University of Missouri, Kansas City) and other institutions. Creating planned civic centers like that envisioned for Kansas City was a primary goal of the City Beautiful movement. Wight's grandiose scheme, then, was not the product of an overblown imagination. Rather, it was consistent with a movement that hoped to generate social, cultural, and economic progress through urban design.

But before Wight's designs could be translated into reality, they had to be approved by the various trustees. As with his designs for the building, Wight's plans for the grounds were repeatedly questioned and criticized by Fred Vincent. From the outset, Vincent was critical of Wight's formal scheme,



19. Thomas Wight, architect, with Thomas Wight and E. Dwight Tarbell, delineators

Presentation Drawing: *Colonnade Proposed for South End of Reflecting Lake*, June 7, 1935

Graphite on illustration board; 18-9/16 x 29 in.; Gift of Mrs. Marjorie Tarbell Brenzani, Miss Shirley Tarbell, and Mrs. Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer, R81-4/6

preferring instead to have an open south lawn. Vincent, in fact, wanted to replace Wight with the local landscape architecture firm of Hare and Hare. Vincent frequently pressed his views on other trustees; John Wilson, for example, received two letters just days apart in the late summer of 1931.⁷⁵ In the second letter to Wilson, Vincent openly criticized Wight's work:

I do not feel at all sure that we should go ahead with the cascades and architectural treatments as suggested by Wight and Wight...To my mind it is a slightly florid treatment, and I think the open space with more trees and shrubs and walks possibly around the side might be much better, and would be done at a big savings...This is a matter which will have to be decided very soon, and while I do not feel that I have any right to pit my ideas against those of Mr. Wight, still, I hope that we can agree on the simpler treatment omitting the cascades and the pillars.⁷⁶

Vincent concluded the letter by suggesting that Hare and Hare be consulted.

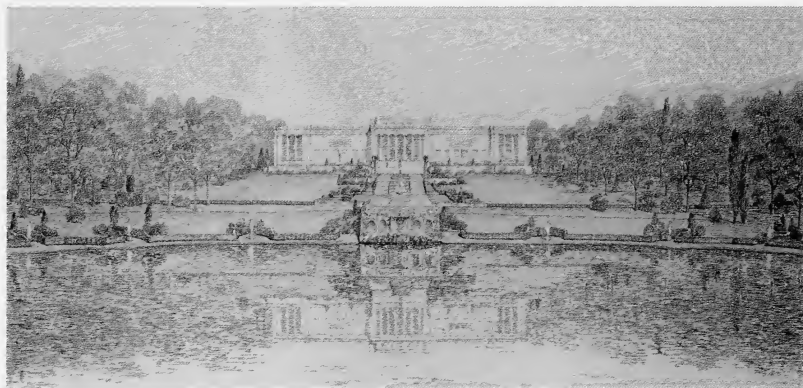
Vincent eventually managed to convince the trustees that Hare and Hare's services were needed—this despite the fact that the trustees had already approved the general form of Wight's design.⁷⁷



20. S. Herbert Hare (1888-1960)

Photograph courtesy of Western Historical Manuscript Collection- Kansas City

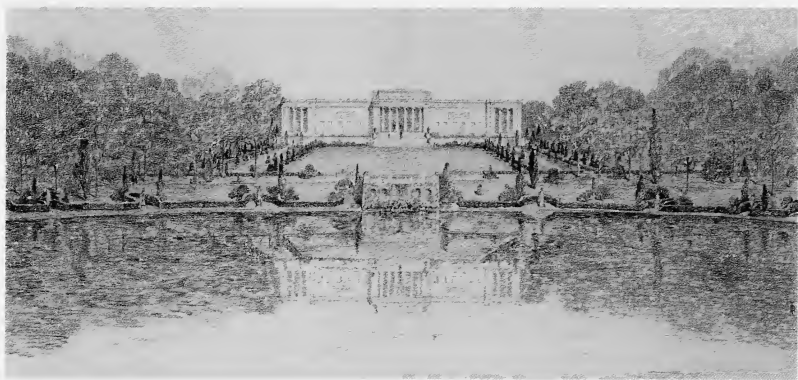
Founded in 1902 by Sid J. Hare (1860-1938), the firm became Hare and Hare in 1910 when his son, S. Herbert Hare (1888-1960; Figure 20), returned to



21. Thomas Wight, architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator

Presentation Drawing: **Formal Approach...View from South End of Lake**, March 3, 1932

Graphite on illustration board, 13-5/8 x 18-1/8 in.; Gift of Mrs. Marjorie Tarbell Brentari, Miss Shirley Tarbell, and Mrs. Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer, R81-4/3



22. S. Herbert Hare, landscape architect, with E. Dwight Tarbell, delineator

Presentation Drawing: **Formal Approach...View from South End of Lake**, January 29, 1932

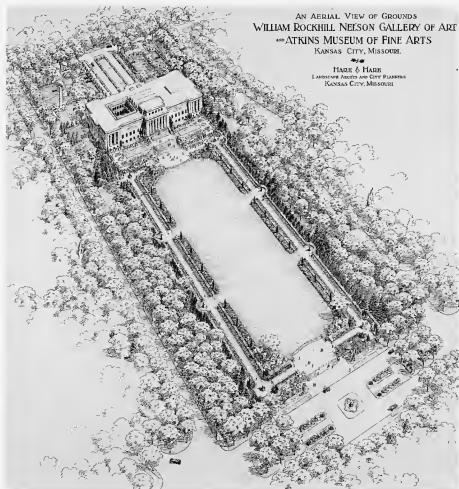
Graphite on illustration board; 13-3/16 x 17-7/8 in.; Gift of Mrs. Marjorie Tarbell Brentani, Miss Shirley Tarbell, and Mrs. Margaret Tarbell Wehmeyer, R81-4/2

Kansas City after two years' training at Harvard under Frederic Law Olmsted Jr. (1870-1957). The firm provided landscape designs for many houses in the Country Club and Mission Hills subdivisions developed by J.C. Nichols. They also possessed experience in urban planning and park design.⁷⁸

Consultation turned into competition when Wight and Wight and Hare and Hare were each asked to produce elevations showing their designs for the south lawn (Figures 21-22). Wight remained true to his original plans while Hare and Hare, not surprisingly, produced a design based on Vincent's preferences. As seen in Figure 22, the Hare and Hare version featured an open central lawn flanked by straight walkways and formal plantings. To Hare and Hare's credit, their design offered a less cluttered and more dramatic vista than Wight's elaborate scheme.

Nichols subsequently took both proposals to Washington in the fall of 1931. There, he hoped to get some free advice from fellow members of the National Capitol Park and Planning Commission. All of the members ended up supporting the Hare

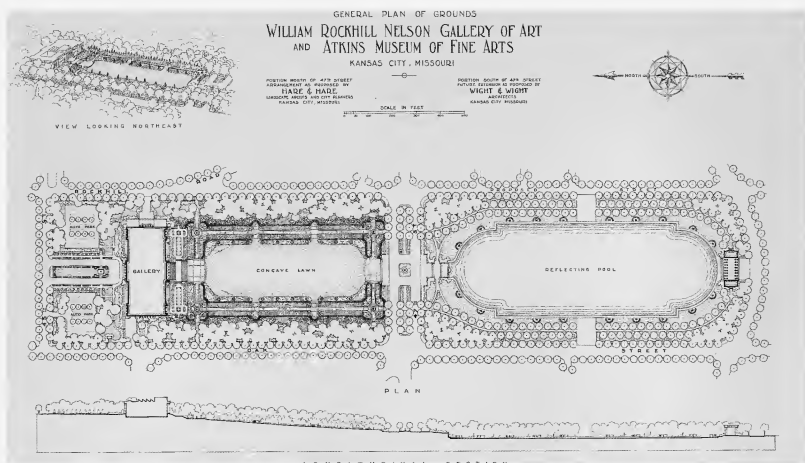
and Hare plan. Mild dissent was offered by Frederic Law Olmsted Jr. (S. Herbert Hare's former teacher). According to Nichols, he liked Wight's plan, but felt that it would cost more than had been budgeted and



23. S. Herbert Hare, landscape architect, with D. D. Obert, delineator

Presentation Drawing: **An Aerial View of Grounds**, June 3, 1932

Ink on linen; 30-3/8 x 29-1/4 in.; Collection of Ochsenr, Hare and Hare



24. S. Herbert Hare, landscape architect and Thomas Wight, architect, with Ralph Reinhardt and D. D. Obert, delineators
Presentation Drawing: **General Plan of Grounds**, c. 1932
Ink on linen; 28-3/4 x 45-1/2 in.; Collection of Ochsner, Hare and Hare

might look “lost and somewhat meaningless” compared to the building.⁷⁹

Fred Vincent’s plans, by way of Hare and Hare, proved victorious. Savoring his victory, Vincent later commented, “...I felt rather pleased that we have not undertaken a dangerous experiment on the south side.”⁸⁰ Once their initial design was approved, Hare and Hare produced more elaborate drawings outlining

their plans for the south lawn (Figures 23-24); plans for the lake remained essentially unchanged from Wight’s original conception.

Late in 1931, with exterior construction nearing completion, work on the south lawn began in earnest. Grading came first, moving some 100,000 cubic yards of dirt to create a smooth, gently sloping south lawn.⁸¹ Much of the dirt removed by the grading was piled along the southeast corner of the grounds. It was thought that the excess dirt would be moved when Rockhill Road was straightened as part of the lake project.

Planting of the over 23,000 plants specified by Hare and Hare soon followed (Figure 25).⁸² Some 75 large trees were moved from their original locations on the east side of the lawn to the naturalistic landscape planned for the west side; some measured as much as eighteen feet in diameter and bore massive root balls ten feet in diameter. Altogether, the plantings included approximately 300 trees,



25. Planting trees on west side of building, c. 1932

4,000 border shrubs, and 2,800 low evergreens. Other plants included peonies, mock oranges, and lilacs. For the walks, Hare and Hare specified pink gravel for the main walkways with bands of crushed green marble and red granite for the borders.

Like the construction of the building, the creation of the grounds was not without minor problems. In 1932, blasting on the south grounds shattered windows in several houses in the Rockhill neighborhood east of the museum. A number of claims were filed with the Long Construction Company and one resident, Walter Berkowitz, even took legal action. He claimed that the blasting had caused \$20,000 in damages to his home; the suit was later dismissed.⁸³ Minor setbacks aside, the south lawn was brought to a relatively swift conclusion (Figure 26).

The reflecting lake, however, did not proceed so quickly. Encumbered by high costs, government bureaucracy, and broader historical events, it was plagued by repeated delays. At the outset, clearing and purchasing the land south of Brush Creek Boulevard caused problems. The Rockhill Tennis Club, then located south of the boulevard, took the William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees to court. Its operators hoped to force the trustees into exercising a lease option that would allow the Club to buy its grounds from the Trust. Though the suit was settled in favor of the Trust, money still had to be found to purchase the required land from the Trust. It was up to the city to raise the necessary funds. In 1934, \$350,000 in bonds were approved for the project, but delays continued.⁸⁴ J.C. Nichols, frustrated by the tedious pace of events, tried to move the project along by suggesting that, through his Washington connections, he could gain the support of President Franklin Roosevelt.⁸⁵ By doing so, Nichols implied that he could get money

from one of the federal public works programs established to combat the Great Depression.

In 1936, some money from the Works Progress Administration was secured for the first phase of the lake construction: enclosing Brush Creek in a large cement box.⁸⁶ This was necessary so that the lake could be built over the small creek. The cement culvert was completed by early November.⁸⁷ Despite this minor success, the project again slowed to a halt. As the Depression worsened, Nichols became even more anxious that money be secured for the lake if for no other reason than to help the local economy. He wrote to Fred Vincent in 1938, "By the Gods, we have to admit that we must do something in this town to get us growing again or we are going to slip backward."⁸⁸



26. Completed building and grounds, October 2, 1934
Photograph courtesy of Ochser, Hare and Hare

Nichols's efforts and exhortations were never successful. The project's enormous costs coupled with the effects of World War II led to its cancellation in November 1944.⁸⁹ Soon after, the City Plan Commission considered a miniaturized version of the lake. At their request, S. Herbert Hare produced a plan calling for a 190-foot by 700-foot lake rather than the 400-foot by 1100-foot design first proposed by Wight some seventeen years earlier. The revised plan also failed; the commission recommended only that land for the project be acquired by the city in

hopes of undertaking it sometime in the future.⁹⁰ After that decision, the reflecting lake was never revived. Its defeat signaled an end to Kansas City's grand City Beautiful schemes.

Though Thomas Wight's landscape designs never made it beyond ink drawings, he did manage to create one of Kansas City's most recognized buildings. To today's eyes, accustomed to the informal architecture of strip malls and suburban subdivisions, his building seems cold, hard, and elite. A closer look, though, reveals a rich decorative program that challenges viewers to decode and appreciate its many stories. From idealized frontier history to poetry cast in bronze, Wight remembered to include in his temple an intimate, human scale. This same emphasis on people and their enjoyment of art characterized the building's interior from its first galleries through decades of redesign, refinement, and reinstallation. Human scale, too, entered into the south lawn and its redesign in the late 1980s. Replacing a bland mass of vegetation, the new design encouraged quiet contemplation of nature amid the newly-installed sculptures of Henry Moore. By bringing people and art together for 60 years, the Nelson-Atkins and its grounds have lived up to its original image as Kansas City's temple to art. J.C. Nichols's idealistic words, first spoken on a December day in 1933, still define its vital function: "May these halls become a rallying place for high ideals and aspirations; may they crystallize a greater love for beauty, a fresh enthusiasm for living; may they be a happy, democratic meeting place for all groups, all races, all creeds..."⁹¹

¹Whistler's *Mother* was and is the popular title of the painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black: Portrait of the Artist's Mother* produced in 1871 by the American artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903). The painting was loaned for the opening of the Nelson-Atkins by the Musée de Louvre, Paris.

²"Art In Every Life," *Kansas City Times*, December 12, 1933.

³J.C. Nichols, "Dedicatory Talk by J.C. Nichols on the Occasion of the Opening of the W.R. Nelson Collection of Art," Draft Minutes file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1934, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives [hereafter, NAMA Archives].

⁴"A Surprise To Art Lovers," *Kansas City Times*, October 17, 1911. On the history of the Atkins Museum planning and other subjects, the author is indebted to Kristie Wolferman, "The Creation of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: 1911-1933" (M.A. thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1986).

⁵"Plan Of Municipal Skyscraper Heard," *Kansas City Post*, October 19, 1911.

⁶"Fine Arts In Penn Valley?," *Kansas City Star*, October 6, 1912.

⁷"New Station Plan," *Kansas City Star*, March 2, 1913.

⁸"Art Museum Near Union Station Is Proposed In Plans Drawn By Kessler," *Kansas City Post*, July 16, 1919.

⁹Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 25.

¹⁰"Start On Art Center," *Kansas City Star*, December 3, 1925.

¹¹Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 25.

¹²Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, October 9, 1930, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.

- ¹³Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 23 and Ibid.
- ¹⁴On Kirkwood's decision, see "Nelson Home As Site For Art Museum," *Kansas City Journal-Post*, October 5, 1926.
- ¹⁵Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 26.
- ¹⁶"The Art Gallery Architects," *Kansas City Star*, July 3, 1927.
- ¹⁷Untitled article, *Kansas City Post*, April 4, 1926.
- ¹⁸Biographical data on the Wight brothers may be found in Walter Williams and Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, *Missouri: Mother of the West*, vol. 3 (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1930); "Thomas Wight," obit., *Kansas City Star*, September 7, 1949; and "William D. Wight," obit., *Kansas City Times*, October 30, 1947.
- ¹⁹Both buildings are pictured in Kansas City Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, *Kansas City* (Kansas City: Kansas City Chapter/AIA, 1979), pp. 65 and 113 respectively.
- ²⁰Giles Mitchell, *There is no Limit: Architecture and Sculpture in Kansas City* (Kansas City: Brown-White Co., 1934), p. 120.
- ²¹"A Plan To Give The William Rockhill Nelson Gallery Of Art A Magnificent Setting And Kansas City An Area Of Inspiring Beauty," *Kansas City Star*, June 3, 1928.
- ²²Wight apparently visited the Cleveland Museum in 1927 (Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 26).
- ²³Wolferman, "Creation of the Nelson-Atkins," p. 24.
- ²⁴Richard B. Fowler, "Turning Point In My Career," *Kansas City Star*, April 26, 1931.
- ²⁵George Ehrlich makes a similar point in his brief description of the building included in *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History* (Kansas City: Historic Kansas City Foundation, 1979), p. 108.
- ²⁶Walter C. Leedy Jr., *Cleveland Builds an Art Museum: Patronage, Politics, and Architecture, 1884-1916* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1991), pp. 55-56.
- ²⁷Untitled article, April 20, 1941, Scrapbook, vol. 9, NAMA Archives.
- ²⁸See Richard J. Bach, "The Modern Museum: Plan and Functions," *Architectural Record*, vol. 62, no. 6 (December 1927): pp. 457-69 for other examples.
- ²⁹On improving museum planning, see Benjamin Ives Gilman, *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (Boston: Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1918); Meyric R. Rogers, "A Study in Museum Planning," *Architectural Record*, vol. 46 no. 6 (December, 1919): pp. 518-28; and Clarence S. Stein, "Making Museums Function," *Architectural Forum*, vol. 56 no. 6 (June 1932): pp. 608-17.
- ³⁰See, for example, Gilman, *Museum Ideals*, pp. 251-76.
- ³¹A.B. Macdonald, "The Nelson Gallery With Vast Halls And 100 Rooms Gets Ready For Art Treasures Of The Ages," *Kansas City Star*, September 11, 1932.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Fiske Kimball, "The Modern Museum of Art," *Architectural Record*, vol. 66, no. 6 (December 1929): p. 574.
- ³⁴Richard B. Fowler, "Turning Point In My Career," *Kansas City Star*, April 26, 1931.
- ³⁵Minutes of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees, March 3, 1930, NAMA Archives.
- ³⁶Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, June 1, 1929, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.

- 37J.C. Nichols to Paul Gardner, January 15, 1934, J.C. Nichols file, Building Superintendent's records, 1946-1956, NAMA Archives.
- 38Fred C. Vincent to Herbert Jones, January 25, 1929, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
- 39"Ready On Art Gallery," *Kansas City Star*, June 27, 1930.
- 40Fred C. Vincent to Herbert Jones, January 25, 1929, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
- 41Ibid.
- 42J.C. Nichols to Edward Robinson, December 15, 1928, J.C. Nichols file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1929-1933, NAMA Archives.
- 43Fred C. Vincent to William Kendall, March 1, 1929, J.C. Nichols file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1929-1933, NAMA Archives.
- 44Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, June 1, 1929, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
- 45F.A. Whiting to J.C. Nichols, November 11, 1929, building file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1929-1933, NAMA Archives.
- 46J.C. Nichols to F.A. Whiting, February 26, 1930, William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1929-1933; William D. Wight to F.A. Whiting, February 27, 1930, J.C. Nichols file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1929-1933; F.A. Whiting to J.C. Nichols, March 12, 1930, Harold Woodbury Parsons file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1930-1933, all in NAMA Archives.
- 47F.A. Whiting to J.C. Nichols, November 11, 1929, Building file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1929-1933, NAMA Archives.
- 48William Rockhill Nelson Trust trustees minutes, March 17, 1930, NAMA Archives.
- 49John Long to Wight and Wight, June 11, 1930, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
- 50Long Construction Company to Building Committee, November 12, 1931, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
- 51"The Huge Spread Of The Projected William Rockhill Nelson Gallery Of Art Reveals Itself As Piers Rise From Solid Rock And Terrace Retaining Walls Take Form," *Kansas City Star*, September 28, 1930.
- 52"A Note Of Grandeur Pervades Art Gallery's Classic Beauty," *Kansas City Star*, December 10, 1933.
- 53"Kansas City's Great Art Gallery Building Now Stands Outlined In Steel, Its Framework Etched Against A Background Of Winter Sky," *Kansas City Star*, January 11, 1931.
- 54Mitchell, *No Limit*, p. 119 and Ibid.
- 55"Atkins Stone Is Laid," *Kansas City Star*, April 6, 1931 and "In Tribute To Art," *Kansas City Star*, May 4, 1931.
- 56Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, March 15, 1932, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
- 57General Specifications: *William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum of Fine Arts*, June 1930, Building Superintendent's Records, 1946-1954, NAMA Archives.

- 58 Newspaper clippings and other biographical information of Keck may be found in the Charles Keck holdings, 2 vols. (1915-1947), Archives of American Art microfilm roll D105, Detroit, MI.
- 59 A useful, short treatment of the Parthenon frieze is in Martin Robertson and Alison Frantz, *The Parthenon Frieze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 60 "Amazed At Art Gallery," *Kansas City Star*, March 20, 1932.
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- 62 The carving of the panels is related in "In Art Gallery's Stone Walls Historic Scenes Are Forming," *Kansas City Star*, January 24, 1932.
- 63 Descriptions of the doors are found in "Spirit Of Longfellow's Indian Epic Poem Captured For Gallery Doors," *Kansas City Star*, July 18, 1933.
- 64 Richard B. Fowler, "Turning Point In My Career," *Kansas City Star*, April 26, 1931.
- 65 The allegorical figures representing the Genius of Art and Truth as well as panels representing Romanesque and Gothic art are now covered over. The murals are described in "Recently Completed Murals For The Mary Atkins Museum," *Kansas City Star*, December 20, 1931.
- 66 Details of MacMorris's career may be found in Daniel MacMorris, *Colours in the Stream* (Kansas City: Jeanne Simpson Gallery of Fine Art, 1974).
- 67 "A Majestic Medieval Touch In Nelson Gallery Vestibule," *Kansas City Star*, May 24, 1932.
- 68 Giuseppe Marchini, "The Architect," in *The Complete Work of Raphael* (New York: Harrison House, 1969), pp. 479-85 and Roger Jones and Nicholas Penny, *Raphael* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 226-30.
- 69 "Art For Embellishment," *Kansas City Star*, June 12, 1938.
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- 71 Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, October 9, 1930 and Long Construction Company to Building Committee, November 12, 1931, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.
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- 73 On the City Beautiful movement, see M. Christine Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983) and William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- 74 "With The Spirit Of Art," *Kansas City Times*, April 5, 1931.
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- 78 Information on Hare and Hare may be found in Walter P. Tracy, *Kansas City and its One Hundred Foremost Men* (Kansas City: Walter P. Tracy, 1925), p. 115; Citizens Historical Association, *Biographical Data of Kansas Citizens* (Indianapolis: Citizens Historical Association, 1938); and Jane Mobley and Cydney Millstein, "Business is Blooming," *Corporate Report* vol. 12, no. 2 (February 1986): p. 39.

⁷⁹J.C. Nichols to Fred C. Vincent, November 28, 1931, U and V file, J.C. Nichols correspondence, 1927-1931, NAMA Archives.

⁸⁰Fred C. Vincent to J.C. Nichols, September 26, 1932, Fred Vincent file, J.C. Nichols correspondence, 1932, NAMA Archives.

⁸¹"The Classic Facade Of Kansas City's Great Art Gallery As Seen Now From Brush Creek Boulevard Through The Cut Made In Grading The South Part Of The Oak Hall Site," *Kansas City Star*, January 3, 1932.

⁸²Plantings are discussed in *List of Plants to Accompany Planting Plans for William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Atkins Museum of Fine Art*, May 3, 1932, NAMA Archives and "How Kansas City's Great Art Gallery Property Will Appear This Fall When It Is Garbed In The Verdure Of One Of The Most Extensive Landscaping Developments In The Central Section Of The Country," *Kansas City Star*, June 5, 1932.

⁸³Fred C. Vincent to John E. Wilson, December 7, 1932; John E. Wilson to Thomas McGee and Sons, December 20, 1932; John E. Wilson to George J. Shaw Hauling Company, December 22, 1932, John E. Wilson correspondence, 1928-1935, NAMA Archives.

⁸⁴"Protect The Art Center," *Kansas City Times*, June 21, 1934.

⁸⁵At the time, Nichols was planning on applying for government aid for the project; it is unclear whether or not this was actually done. J.C. Nichols to Ray Wilson, April 19, 1935, William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1937, NAMA Archives.

⁸⁶"Step Toward Mirror Lake Set To Start," *Kansas City Journal-Post*, June, 21, 1936.

⁸⁷"Box For Brush Creek Is Complete," *Kansas City Times*, November 14, 1936.

⁸⁸J.C. Nichols to Fred C. Vincent, December 10, 1938, University Trustees file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1938, NAMA Archives.

⁸⁹"Drop Lake Plan," *Kansas City Times*, November 29, 1944.

⁹⁰The city eventually acquired the land in 1955, cleared the few houses occupying the site, and created an open, naturalistic mall.

⁹¹J.C. Nichols, "Dedicatory Talk by J.C. Nichols on the Occasion of the Opening of the W.R. Nelson Collection of Art," Draft Minutes file, William Rockhill Nelson Trust general correspondence, 1934, NAMA Archives.

A P P E N D I X 1

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Gene Arthur Budig	1981-

University of Oklahoma Presidents

William B. Bizzell	1926-1941
Joseph A. Brandt	1941-1943
George L. Cross	1944-1968
J. Herbert Hollomon	1958-1970
Paul F. Sharp	1971-1976
William Banowsky	1976-1985
Frank E. Horton	1985-1988
Richard L. Van Horn	1989-

APPENDIX 2

EXTERIOR SCULPTURE PANELS

Charles Keck, sculptor of the building's narrative panels, described the scenes on the east and south walls after their completion:

EAST FACADE (from left to right):

1. "The Spanish exploration and invasion from the south. Hernando De Soto, with his train of soldiers and Indians, slowly pushes toward the Missouri River, lured on by the vision of finding the Seven Cities of Cibala and untold wealth; led into danger and trials by the cunning stories of the Indians of the Land Beyond."
2. "De Soto, dying, gives his sword and the command of the company to Luis de Moscoso to carry on the expedition."
3. "The body of De Soto is lowered into the Mississippi River at night to cover up the trace of the white commander's death from the Indians."
4. "After a period of bitter struggle and hard colonization for the French in the North, and the Spanish in the South, mixed with difficulties in Europe between the mother countries, the way is paved for the purchase of the territory by the United States. Jefferson having sent James Monroe to France to join Robert Livingstone, the minister there, the treaty is finally signed in the presence of Napoleon by Marbois, Monroe, and Livingstone in 1803."
5. "La Salle, a French soldier and explorer, is sent out during a lull in the Iroquois War to search the Mississippi. He comes upon the Ohio and Illinois rivers and lays claim to them in the name of France."
6. "Pere Marquette, accompanied by Joliet, an experienced guide, during a trip down the Mississippi, stop at an Indian village where they are treated to a calumet dance and given a pipe which will enable them to march fearlessly for the rest of the journey."
7. "The French invasion from the north. The zeal of the fur traders to extend their posts, the spiritual hope of the missionaries for making converts among the Indians, and the fierce disposition of the Hurons toward the French settlers in Canada start the trend of French civilization south."

SOUTH FACADE (from right to left):

1. "The trappers, or 'coureurs de bois,' seeking rich furs, did the first work to penetrate the wilderness. They were followed closely by the traders."

2. "The government sent out expeditions. One of the greatest difficulties centered around the Indians. It was necessary to make treaties with them to relinquish their rights to the land. Captain William Clark, the head of Indian affairs, finally purchased all the land within the state of Missouri."

3. "A scout leading the wilderness invasion."

4. "Preparation and loading of a wagon train at Westport Landing, where pioneers left the watercourse of the Missouri River to continue in their covered wagons the westward journey over the famous trails to Oregon, to Santa Fe and California."

5. "A struggle between the Indians and white men for the right of possession. The central figure represents Fortitude protecting the pioneers."

6. "The resumption of the westward progress overland."

7. "Indians watching the fast growing boat trade on the Missouri River."

8. "A rider for the pony express."

9. "Operation of an early printing press to indicate the more advanced and permanent settlement in Kansas City."

WEST FACADE (from right to left):

1. Cattle roundup
2. Pioneer mother teaching children
3. Settler cultivating his land
4. Allegorical image of the Pioneer Mother
5. Building a log house
6. Native Americans observing arrival of railroad
7. Native American buffalo hunt

Source: The Teachers College Scout, vol. 5, no. 1 (April 1934): pp. 18-19.

A P P E N D I X 3

SCENES FROM THE SONG OF HIAWATHA AS DEPICTED ON SOUTH AND EAST DOORS

SOUTH DOORS

West Pair - Left Door (from top to bottom)

And he loved the lonely maiden,
Who thus waited for his coming;
(Canto II)

And the West-Wind came at evening,...
Found the beautiful Wenonah,
(Canto III)

West Pair - Right Door

And the might Mudjekeewis,...
Smote again the Mishe-Mokwa
(Canto II)

Rent the jutting crag asunder,...
Hurled them madly at his father,
(Canto IV)

Center Pair - Left Door

Aim your arrows, Hiawatha,
At the head of Megisogwon,
(Canto IX)

From the lips of Nawadaha,...
In the Vale of Tawasentha,
(Introduction)

Center Pair - Right Door

Still he did not leave his laughing,...
Only made the fire burn brighter
(Canto II)

While the Master of Life, ascending,...
Vanished from before their faces,
(Canto I)

East Pair - Left Door

Shawondasee, fat and lazy,
Had his dwelling far to southward,
(Canto II)

Bathe now in the stream before you,
Wash the war-paint from your faces,
(Canto I)

East Pair - Right Door

Gitche Manito, the mighty,...
Called the tribes of men together.
(Canto I)

Thus the merry Pau-Puk-Keewis
Danced his Beggar's Dance to please them,
(Canto XI)

EAST DOORS

South Pair - Left Door (from top to bottom)

Then Waywassimo, the lightning,
Smote the doorways of the caverns,
(Canto XVII)

Saw his lovely Minnehaha
Lying dead and cold before him,
(Canto XX)

South Pair - Right Door

And before him breathless, lifeless,
Lay the youth, with hair dishevelled,
(Canto V)

...Nahma,...
Opened his great jaws, and swallowed
Both canoe and Hiawatha
(Canto VIII)

Center Pair - Left Door

From the distant land of Wabun,...
Came the Black-Robe chief, the Prophet,
(Canto XXII)

Thus it was that Hiawatha,
In his wisdom, taught the people
(Canto XIV)

Center Pair - Right Door

Westward, westward Hiawatha
Sailed into the fiery sunset,
(Canto XXII)

So they sat and played together,
All the old men and the young men,
(Canto XVI)

North Pair - Left Door

Walked in silent, grave procession,
Bearing each a pouch of healing,
(Canto XV)

Nushka! you shall have a sweetheart,
You shall have a handsome husband!
(Canto XIII)

North Pair - Right Door

From the wigwam he departed,
Leading with him Laughing Water;
(Canto X)

Mimicked in their gait and gestures
Some old man, bent almost double,
(Canto XIII)

A P P E N D I X 4

C O R N I C E I N S C R I P T I O N S

NORTH FACADE

Seraphs share with thee Knowledge but Art, O Man, is thine alone.

- *Friedrich von Schiller* (1759-1805)

Art deals with things forever incapable of definition and that belong to love, beauty, joy and worship; the shapes, powers and glory of which are ever building, unbuilding and rebuilding in each man's soul and in the soul of the whole world.

- *Plotinus* (205?-270 A.D.)

True painting is only the image of the perfection of God.

- *Michelangelo* (1475-1564)

As all Nature's thousand changes but one changeless God proclaim; so in Art's wide kingdom ranges one sole meaning still the same; this is Truth, eternal Reason which from Beauty takes its dress, and serene through time and season stands for aye in loveliness.

- *Johann Goethe* (1749-1832)

WEST FACADE

Through art we realize our perfection.

- *Oscar Wilde* (1854-1900)

Art still has truth, take refuge there.

- *Matthew Arnold* (1822-1888)

SOUTH FACADE

The soul has greater need of the ideal than of the real.

- *Victor Hugo* (1802-1885)

It is by the real that we exist, it is by the ideal that we live.

- *Victor Hugo* (1802-1885)

EAST FACADE

All passes. High art alone is eternal.

- *Théophile Gautier* (1811-1872)

The sculptured bust outlasts the citadel.

- *Théophile Gautier* (1811-1872)

Note: Many of the quotations were substantially paraphrased and/or loosely translated from their original forms; poetic structure and punctuation were also abandoned in several cases.

Source: List found in Gallery History, 1933-1949 file, NAMA Archives.

A P P E N D I X 5

M A R B L E T Y P E S

LOCATION	TYPE	ORIGIN
South Vestibule Walls and Arches	Kacimo	Kansas City, Missouri
North and South Columns, Door and Base Trim in Kirkwood Hall	Ste. Genevieve Golden Vein	Ste. Genevieve, Missouri
Walls of Kirkwood Hall	Biesanz Travertine	Winona, Minnesota
Columns of Kirkwood Hall	Pyrenees Black and White	St. Pons, France
Column Capitals in Kirkwood Hall	Mansota	Mankato and Kasota, Minnesota
Columns and Walls of Rozzelle Court	Mankato	Mankato, Minnesota
Floors of Rozzelle Court	Crab Orchard	Tennessee
Columns and Walls of Atkins Stair Hall	Siena Gray and Yellow	Siena, Italy
Balustrade and Wainscot of Atkins Stair Hall	Botticino	Brescia, Italy
Stair Treads, Risers, and Floors in Atkins Stair Hall	Hauteville	Hauteville-Lompnes, France
Gallery Door Jambs, Base Moldings, Stairways	Napoleon Gray	Missouri
Wainscot and Trim in Classical Hall, Burnap Gallery, Renaissance Sculpture Gallery, Chinese Sculpture Gallery	Manzora	Arizona(?)

Source: Lists found in Gallery History, 1933-1949 file, NAMA Archives.

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